

FOLKTALES OF MEANDASH, THE MYTHIC SAMI REINDEER

Part II

Enn Ernits

A SUMMARY OF MARRIAGE STORIES

The **first** subgroup contains three recorded stories, but as one of the recorded extracts is far too short to analyse, we can only speak of two quoted variants from the Imandra region, and even then the tribal origin of the narrator remains uncertain. Both variants have a similar structure (Table 3). We could distinguish between four parts: 1) the building of the reindeer home, 2) marriage, 3) the reaction of the old man's daughters and 4) their fate. All variants (incl. the fragmentary third variant) contain references to the river of blood separating the two spheres of the universe, which may be crossed only with the help of chanting.

The motif of building the reindeer home, which symbolises the young reindeer starting a family life, is not mentioned in the second story, as the widow already had a home. This very motif is also present in two stories of another subgroup from Kildin (9, 10). Thus we might assume that all of the marriage-related stories of the first subgroup have been recorded only from the Kildin people.

The basic differences between the two variants are: 1) in one story the reindeer is a widow and is in search of a wife himself, whereas in another story it is the mother who marries her son to a woman, 2) in one variant the unsuitable brides are gored to death, in another they are turned into stones and 3) the elder daughters cannot keep the children's beds clean. The latter fact is actually borrowed from the story about the departure.

The ideal variant of the first subgroup might be pictured as follows: the reindeer man's mother, or the reindeer man himself, proposed first to the eldest, then to the middle and last to the youngest daughter of a mortal from the other side of the river of blood. The first two daughters were disobedient and evil, and were there-

Motif	1st story	2nd story
Erecting the tent	+	-
Marriage	mother proposed marriage	widow reindeer proposed marriage himself
The river of blood	+	+
The conduct of the elder daughters	failed in drying footwear; beat the sisters and brothers of Meandash	did not look after the reindeer children; let them wet their beds
The fate of the elder daughters	were turned into stones	were gored to death
The conduct of the youngest daughter	was very attentive to drying footwear; pampered Meandash's sisters and brothers, placed wreathes on their horns	pampered the reindeer children, placed wreathes on their horns; kept the children's beds tidy
The fate of the youngest daughter	became Meandash's wife	became Meandash's wife

Table 3. The motifs of subgroup 1 relative to variants.

fore sentenced to death. The reindeer man married the hardworking and obedient youngest daughter.

The **second** subgroup has been recorded several times more than the first and the third one, containing one variant from Aahkkel, three from the Kildin people and six from the Turia people. The origin of one variant is not known, and it is also incomplete, as the narrator does not specify who married whom and mentions nothing of the fate of the daughters. The 17th story, however, has been edited for literal purposes.

The stories of the second subgroup describe: 1) the proposals of three suitors and 2) the parents' visit to their daughters.

The Aahkkel and Kildin stories cover the marriage proposal relatively briefly (Table 4). The conflict between two parents from dif-

Number and origin of story	Similarities and differences
8. * Aahkkel	A brief account of the marriage proposal; a conflict between two parents of different origin.
9. Kildin	A brief account of the marriage proposal
10. Kildin	A brief account of the marriage proposal; the old woman's dream: seal's flippers, raven's beak, reindeer's hoofs; daughters were suddenly married
11. Turia	The old woman's words in the morning: raven's wings are crooked, seal's legs spread, the reindeer's horns are lowered
12. * Turia	Lighting a fire; the old woman's words in the morning: a man with pitch black raven wings, flippers of a sea animal showing, flamboyant horns of a reindeer
13. * Turia	A longer account of the marriage proposal; lighting a fire; the old woman's words in the morning: raven's wings showing, seal's flippers scraping, reindeer's horns seen
14. Turia	The three suitors gathered together; the old man tells them to carve out piggins
15. Turia	A long and original account of the marriage proposal; weddings; the newly-wed couple left the next morning; the old woman's words: head hanging like the raven's, feet stretched out like seal's flippers, hanging down like reindeer horns
16. Turia	The three suitors gather together; the old man tells his daughters to make their choice between the suitors
18. Unknown	The old man tells his daughters to go to the seashore and marry the first creature/suitor they see
19. Kildin	A brief account of the marriage proposal; lighting a fire; raven wings above the vapour vent; reindeer horns above the vent

Table 4. Three suitors in different variants (the asterisk marks the accounts recorded by V. Charnoluski).

The number and origin of the story	Visitors: the old man (M), the old woman (W); following events	Injured body parts: eyes (E), hands (H)	Food/eating at the raven's (R), seal's (S), reindeer's (RD) homes
8.* Aahkkel	M; also brought W to visit	E, H	R: leftovers, S: beef and fat, RD: fresh meat, fine fat
9. Kildin	M; returned home with his daughter	–	R: peritoneum, uppers of boots ,S: fish scraps, RD: meat dishes
10. Kildin	M, W; returned home later	E, H	R: -; S, RD: ate
11. Turia	M; returned home later	E, H	R, S: -; RD: a lot of food was given to them to take along
12.* Turia	M, W; M brought his belongings to daughter's home; settled there to live	E, H	R, S, RD: ate
13.* Turia	M, W; settled there to live	E, H	–
14. Turia	M; stayed there overnight	E, H	RD: pork fat, marrow
15. Turia	M; M also brought W to visit their daughter	E	R, RD: ate, S: fish dishes
16. Turia	M; returned home later	E, H	R, S: ate, RD: fish, meat
18. Unknown	M; stayed there overnight	–	R, S: ate, RD: -
19. Kildin	W, M; M brought his belongings to the daughter's place; both settled there	E, H	R: leftovers from dinner, S: fish, RD: meat

Table 5. The parents' visit in different variants (the asterisk marks the accounts recorded by V. Charnoluski).



Figure 11. A bird-man with theriomorphic headdress and wings. A bronze stud from the Perm province. 1st–3rd centuries. After Oborin, Chagin 1988: 60.

ferent totemist groups might be a fabrication of V. Charnoluski. The dream motif is not present in other variants. It is very typical to both Kildin as well as Turia stories to characterise the suitors by a certain part of their body (*pars pro toto*). The 14th story is influenced by a miracle tale. The 15th story is also quite unique. Regrettably, the uniqueness of major characteristics and also the possible “additions” made by V. Charnoluski do not reveal the origin of the stories and motifs. Several Turia stories contain implications that the father ordered his daughters to choose between the suitors; the same implication is present in the 18th story, which is of unknown origin. The Turia people seemed to know two different types of marriage proposal stories: the stories of the first type describe how the suitors come to the house and are married first to the eldest, then to the middle and last to the youngest daughter, but in the stories of the second type the daughters can choose their husband themselves, providing they follow certain rules. Some stories contain significant traces of memory lapses.

So, we could form two ideal variants on the marriage proposal:

1. The old man (and his wife) had three daughters. The raven man married the eldest, the seal man the middle and the reindeer man the youngest daughter. The daughters were taken to their husbands’ homes.
2. The old man (and his wife) had three daughters. The daughters were told to get married according to certain rules. Three suitors came (the raven man, seal man and reindeer man), or the daughters went out to look for them. The daughters married the suitor of their choice.

In the majority of stories the newlywed couple was visited by the old man (7 variants), and sometimes also by the old man and his wife together (4 versions). (Table 5) The 15th story is original in that the old man returned home after visiting each daughter. In

eight variants it was mentioned that the two eldest daughters had been injured by their husbands, and in one variant it was the raven's wife only, while two variants contain no references to injuries.

The accounts from the entire Kola region contain almost identical descriptions of grandchildren, who were attributed certain zoomorphic features during the visit of the old man and his wife; in some accounts several features have been forgotten, particularly in the 18th story. Two stories contain no reference to the grandchildren around the house.

Ordinarily, the parents ate at their daughter's house. It is mentioned in all stories but the 13th. As regards food descriptions, the 9th story is the closest to the ideal variant. In some accounts eating is not at all mentioned in the visiting event, or is mentioned in general terms, like *ate* or *ate and drank*.

Neither the events following the visit nor how the visit ended are described in the Kildin version, and on two occasions (both accounts, especially the 18th, are very fragmentary) the old man stays at his daughter's house for only one night. We might assume that the idea to settle there was more original; in four variants the visitors returned home, and in five variants they settled at their youngest daughter's home. V. Charnoluski's records of the visiting event appear to be credible. Other stories, except for the 12th and the 19th, contain no indications of bringing belongings from home.

The ideal version of the visiting event might be the following: The old man alone, or with his wife, visited their daughters in turn. The raven man had pecked out the eldest daughter's eye. The children were flying above the tent. The family of the eldest daugh-



Figure 12. A Sami at the second half of the 18th century. From the collection "All Nations in Russia" by Johann Gottlieb George. After Kosmenko 1993: 13.

ter ate meat scraps, peritoneum, etc. Then they visited the seal man. The seal's children were sliding down the roof of the tent. The hand of the middle daughter was bitten off. The seal's family ate only fish or fish scraps. Then they visited the reindeer man. His children were playing with horns, or some kind of a horn game. The youngest daughter had a good life. The family ate meat. The old man and his wife settled there.

The stories of the **third** subgroup consist of three elements: 1) marriage, 2) the daughters' conduct and 3) their fate. These elements largely coincide with the first subgroup, the main differences being that they 1) do not mention the building of the reindeer tent, 2) describe different wrongdoings, which might be reduced to disobedience and evil-mindedness.

Only two stories of the third subgroup are known to have been published. The 20th story is clearly connected to the story of a dog-man. In the first story, the mother turned both prospective daughter-in-laws into stones, and in the second the reindeer gored the middle daughter to death.

The ideal version of the third subgroup might be something like the following: The reindeer man was first married to the eldest, then the middle and then the youngest daughter of the family of mortals. The two elder daughters misbehaved and were sentenced to death. The reindeer man married the youngest, obedient daughter.

To conclude we might say that besides the marriage to a reindeer or a dog, the totemist folktales of the Sami also mention marriage to other animals (bears, wolves, birds, fish), and transformation into them (see Itkonen 1946: 536–537).

Departure from wife

The departure consists of 1) the warning and 2) the misdeed, 3) the reindeer's and his children's escape from the house and 4) the mother's reaction.

The misdeed was that the children had wetted their beds. This caused an unpleasant smell in the tent, which the reindeer father could not stand. The story could be explained by a common prac-

Figure 13. "Family unity" (After V. Charnoluski). Parents and their child on back of a lizard-like creature under the archway of reindeer heads. A bronze stud from the Perm province. 8th–9th centuries. After Oborin, Chagin 1988: 125.



tice of hunters, according to which they have to be very clean, as animals have an excellent sense of smell. In a mythical sense this was a taboo for the hunters (see also Charnoluski 1966: 303). Violation of the taboo upset the situation: Meandash could no longer transform himself into a human. The solution was to flee.

In the myth, the reindeer husband could no longer transform himself into a human because of the bad smell, and hence he fled the home and his child(ren) followed. This was a second escape, the second crossing of the border. The first escape was running away from his childhood home. The escape motif explains 1) why the reindeer do not live among humans, and 2) how wild reindeer became the primary livelihood for the Sami. Thus it also has the characteristics of a legend.

Naturally, the mother was shocked by such turn of events. Her conduct in different versions varies: in some stories she gave her children her blessing, in others she threatened them, and in yet other stories she followed her family herself. As the stories contain the contamination of two escapes (from mother and from wife), I would like to further elaborate on the stories of the first escape, as the mother's reaction to both stories is very similar.

One of the peculiarities of the **first** story is that Meandash went to his mother to complain about his ill fate. Several versions mention her offering him the breast, but in this case the narrator must be mistaken. In such cases it was Meandash's wife who gave the breast to her child. In his account, P. Sarvanov mentions the four nipples of the reindeer calf's mother. In other versions the warnings are addressed to Meandash's son.

Another peculiarity of the story is that Meandash's wife wrapped herself in the skin soaked with urine and turned into the fairy of

the reindeer, who determined the reproduction of reindeer and resultingly also the fate of the Sami. V. Petrukhin has claimed that the reindeer wife was a mediator between the hunting tribe and the animal kingdom, and generally transformed into the fairy of animals in developed mythology (Petrukhin 1986: 5). This applies also in the story under discussion. If her being wrapped in the soaked reindeer skin was not coincidental, then the motif might be related to the notion of fertility. Parallels could be drawn with the legend about *Meandash-pyyrre* who could render an area fertile by urinating there (see 29th story).

The first story is contaminated with the concept of a reindeer elf. According to the source material this function is served by *Luot Hozik* who lives in the tundra among the vast moss fields and protects domesticated reindeer and sends the wild reindeer to death by the hunter's bullet, as the Sami believe (Haruzin 1890: 152). T. Itkonen has made reference to an analogous creature in the Kolta belief: it is an anthropomorphic but hairy *miehtts-hozjen* (the Sami forest elf), who is believed to protect domesticated reindeer (Itkonen 1945/1946: 129).

The **second** story is in fact a story about the first escape, but with no reference to the mother's response.

The **third** story is unique because of the son's rude reply to his mother. The benevolence of the latter softened the son's heart and he wished her well. It also includes an alternate reference to the reindeer tent.

The **fourth** story is concerned with the first escape and the reindeer mother's curse: you, my son, will not escape the bullet. The legend explains the origin of reindeer hunting.

In the **fifth** story the narrator has combined two types of departures, namely, the reindeer's departure from his mother's home and his flight from his wife.

The **sixth** story contains an interesting piece of advice: a brave hunter can have his heart pierced with a horn. This indicates an effort to draw a distinction between true hunters and others.

The **eighth** story largely coincides with the 17th story, and differs from the latter in that:

1. Meandash told his wife to throw the urine-soaked skins into the river or stream, and not keep them in the tent, dry them in the open air or hang them on the door. In the 4th story the husband told her she could not hang the skins out in the sun.
2. It contains an embedded story, in which the daughter tells the old woman of her going to pick berries, and repeats Meandash's orders and prohibitions.
3. It claims that Meandash cannot transform himself into a human because of the bad smell.

The **ninth** story contains traces of memory lapses on the part of the narrator. In this story it was the old man who had wetted the bed. Other stories mention nothing of the mother's settling at the home of the old man. In other stories the motif of the reindeer home is associated with the motif of marriage.

The **tenth** story describes the destruction of the tent by father and son. This refers to the destruction of the microcosm they had been living in up to that point.

The **twelfth** story differs from the others in that it mentions two wrongdoings: the first caused by the old woman before the reindeer ran away from home, the other taking place after the flight. As we know, the negative incident took place in the evening. The eloquent speech delivered by *Meandash-paarn*, or at least some parts of it, appears to be fabricated by V. Charnoluski (cf. also 14th and 15th story). In her warning, his mother also suggests he narrow his eyes not to harm the hunter with his look, as Meandash could blind a human (cf. 25th story).

After her reindeer husband's departure, his wife married a mortal man, but her life was not a success. The reindeer man appeared to his former wife in her dreams and told her to murder her husband in a sacred place, to start sleeping on his skin and to eat his head and brain (the same motif in the 15th, 19th and 22nd stories). This motif also refers to the significance of animal skin in Sami religion. J. Sergeieva (1994: 169) has correctly assumed that the motif

of killing symbolises ritual sacrifice. The story suggests that a sacred animal could not be slaughtered at random places: contact with a sacred object could be established only in a sacred place.

From the folktale under discussion we learn that only the primal mother was allowed to eat the reindeer's head and brain, it was otherwise forbidden for females (see e.g. Itkonen 1946: 269).

It is likely that the Sami folktale represents a legend of a dying and then reborn wild animal known all over the world. The Sami considered flowing water to be a magical and universal purifying agent. In their folk belief, flowing water brought the skins to the place where new reindeer embryos were born. The tale describes how according to the Sami conception the skins are taken somewhere far away, where they ascend to heaven to the Sun God. The latter might also refer to *Meandash-pyyrre* (see 29th story).

The **fourteenth** story is concerned with the burning of the reindeer skin, followed by the separation of the animal and human domains.

The **fifteenth** story presents the idea that the life of an old reindeer would be meaningless (his teeth were falling out, as a result he was already doomed as he could no longer eat), unless he sacrificed himself for ritual purposes. The reindeer instructed that his head should be placed directly on the ears of the bed skin, because it was in the ears that the soul of the reindeer was supposed to lie (see also 22nd story).



Figure 14. Worshipping a seita-stone. After J. Schefferus (17th cent.).

Another interesting motif is the eating of reindeer eyes. This has been associated with the cult of Mother Earth and fertility. The Arctic nations (the Nganasans, the Chukchi, etc.) attributed the eyes of wild animals, incl. the reindeer, considerable importance. Also, a report from the Sami recorded by Tuderus in 1910 says that a slaughtered reindeer could not be taken inside the tent with its eyes still in its head. The eating of eyes also refers to the original ritual, which described the possession of the first reindeer embryos by Mother Earth for the purpose of fertility (Simchenko 1976: 239). In an attempt to reconstruct the world view of the ancient Sami, we might conceive that 1) while eating, the eyes entered a woman (cf. eating something is associated with becoming pregnant in the religion of many peoples) and 2) the woman was in fact Mother Earth herself (cf. Charnoluski 1965: 83). The connection between the reindeer and earth has also been mentioned by the Swedish Sami, who used to make sacrifices to it (or her), as the earth was believed to feed the reindeer and give them sexual drive (Holmberg 1915: 60).

In the **nineteenth** story the reindeer suggested to his wife that throwing his skin into water would bring her success. This refers to the circuit of life (see the 12th story).

The protagonist in the **twentieth** story is a dog man, although the mother's warnings suggest it was really a reindeer who set traps for dogs. The story concludes with the mother-in-law and daughter giving birth to reindeer calves.

The **twenty-second** story resembles the 12th story; the major peculiarities of the latter are: 1) it lacks the starting motifs, incl. the misdeed of urinating, 2) the woman turns into a male reindeer and 3) the story has a different (it is doubtful, whether authentic) etiological ending (associations with a steady love between the man and his wife). The first and last differences might be considered secondary. The story reveals that women were traditionally not allowed to touch the meat of sacrificed reindeer (also Charnoluski 1966: 305).

The story explains in detail how to lie to sleep on the slaughtered reindeer skin, namely, one's head has to be placed on the head part of the skin, on the ears, to be more precise. Nor does the remark

that the skin must be placed with the fur on the outside appear to be mere speculation, as hairiness also symbolises fertility. The story also provides a clear idea of the division of the soul.

Summary of departure stories. There are two types of departures in the Meandash stories: the first one is the reindeer's running away from his mother, the second one from his wife. The second type of departure has been recorded in a total of 13 variants, incl. two versions from the Imandra region, two from Aahkkel and two from the Kolta people, four versions from the Kildins and three from the Turia people. Therefore, the motif of the reindeer's departure was known all over the Kola Peninsula. Another three versions of the first departure have been recorded: two from the Kolta and one from the Turia people. These are particularly interesting because of their treatment of the mother's response.

The account of departure is similar in both stories recorded from the Imandra region, although the mother's response is rather different. Both are associated with the first subtype of marriage stories. The stories from Aahkkel (and from the western regions) bear no similarities. The second story from Aahkkel resembles the 12th and 15th stories originating from Turia, which describe the reindeer wife's second marriage to a mortal man. In contrast to the Imandra stories, the story from Aahkkel (the 8th) is closely connected to the second subtype of marriage story; as to the mother's response, the only similarity with the 1st story is the motif of offering the breast.

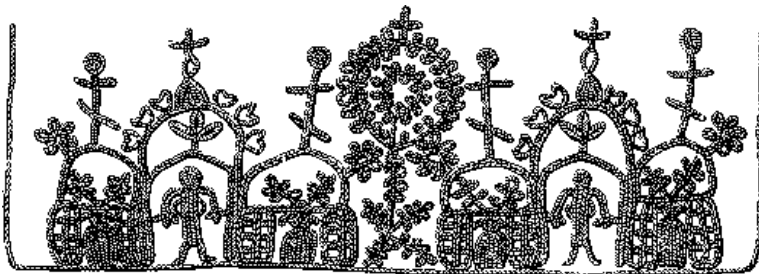


Figure 15. Women and reindeer in a church with three aisles. An embroidery from the Tver gubernatorial district (the 1880s). After Rõbakov 1994: 485, see also 480). The sacredness of the composition is beyond doubt.

Number and origin of story	Type of marriage	Who urinated	Doer of misdeed	Misdeed
1. Imandra	I	child	–	bad smell
3. Kildin	–	child	wife	hung up the skin
6. Imatra	I	child	–	bad smell
8. Aahkkel	II	child	mother-in-law	hung the skin in the doorway
9. Kildin	II	father-in-law	wife	hung the skin at the back door
10. Kildin	II	father-in-law	mother-in-law	dried the skin on the pathway
12. Turia	II	child	mother-in-law -> wife	hung the skin to dry in the sun
14. Turia	II	–	wife	burned her husband's skin
15. Turia	II	–	mother-in-law	hung the skin up to dry
18. Unknown	II	the old man	wife	dried the skin near the tent
19. Kildin	II	children	mother-in-law	hung the skin on the door
20. Kolta	III	child	–	bad smell
22. Aahkkel	–	–	relatives	?

Table 6. Types of marriage and misdoing.

The motif of departure could be associated with all three types of marriage (Table 6). We must admit that half the cases (3 variants) are concerned with the first flight. In two cases the mother's response does not betray which departure is referred to. In one of the stories from Kolta region (the 3rd version) the mother wanted to

nurse her grown-up son, which must be a misrepresentation, as in other stories the mother feeds her nurselings.

The intriguing questions concerning the misdeed are: 1) the kind of misdeed (which taboo was violated). 2) who wetted the bed and 3) who was responsible for that (Table 6).

The unique story from Aahkkel (the 22nd) does not reveal the cause of the reindeer's anger. In the 14th story it is explained by burning the husband's skin; but this is a borrowed motif. The two variants from the Imandra region and one Kolta story mention only the wetting of beds by a child. In the remaining 8 stories the rules of handling the wetted skins have been broken: it has not been cast into the water, but has been hung up to dry in the sun. In two Kildin stories (the 9th and the 10th) and one variant of unknown origin (the 18th) the skin was wetted by the father-in-law (the total of 23%), in 8 cases (or 61.5%) it was done, as one might expect, by a child. In the 18th variant several events have been forgotten. We cannot be certain whether this is also the case in other variants: the person who wetted the bed must not have been that important, perhaps it was intended to focus on the description of the violation of the taboo and its results.

I intend to analyse in greater depth the mother's response in 16 variants. Before the children left she: 1) offered them her breast, 2) warned them against danger (people, animals), 3) cursed her son and/or 4) shared some advice for life (Table 7).

On 9 occasions (56.2%) the mother nursed her children and on 7 occasions (43.8%) warned them against humans. Other responses are rare. For example, in one story from Imandra (the 6th variant) and in one story from Turia (the 12th) she advised a reindeer son to become the target of people. In one case (1st variant) the mother turned into a fairy of the reindeer. All this suggests that the idea was to warn the reindeer son against evil people, which might result in the destruction of the animal population.

Quite unique are two stories from Turia, one from Kildin and one from Aahkkel (the 12th, the 15th, the 19th, and the 22nd), which describe the widowed reindeer wife's marriage to a mortal woman. The motif of departure thus lavishly describes the violation of an

ancient taboo and everything connected with it, also offering answers to the following etiological questions: 1) why are the reindeer isolated from people (the 8th variant), 2) how did the hunting for the reindeer begin (the 4th story) and 3) why the reindeer are fearful (the 5th story).

CULTURE HERO

The **twenty-third** story is in fact a monologue delivered by Meandash, the culture hero. The only recorded variant could be divided in three: 1) favours (Meandash had given mankind a hunting bow and taught them to hunt), 2) Meandash's teachings (nobody was allowed to kill a reindeer; it was permitted to kill only one reindeer cow to feed the family) and 3) consequences of disobedience (the number of wild reindeer had become smaller).

In ancient times people understood that excessive hunting was dangerous. In order to save the reindeer, the main source of food for the Sami, they established ecologically optimal requirements for hunting. The restrictions were most stringent for the reindeer who were herd leaders, as according to the folk tales a herd could be led by a shaman who had been transformed into a reindeer (see Itkonen 1931: 221-223; Kert 1980: 66).

The narrator of the story had heard it from his grandfather; he thought it originated in the so-called 'times of ancestors', or the indefinite past, the mythical era. The informer associated the time

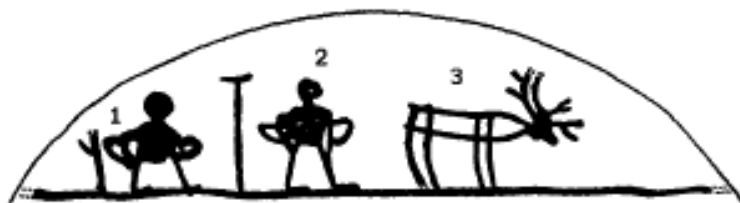


Figure 16. A detail of the Sami troll drum. In 1691 its owner Anders Poulsen explained the figures depicted on it as follows: 1 – ilmaris, i.e. storm and bad weather, 2 – diermes, i.e. thunder, 3 – a wild reindeer. After Rydving 1991: 38–39. Is it a coincidence that Tiermes and the reindeer are depicted on the drum standing next to each other?

No. and origin of variant	Breast-feeding	Warning against people	Warning against animals	Laying a curse on the son	Suggestion to become prey
1. Imandra	+	+	+	-	-
2. Kolta	+	-	-	-	-
3. Kildin	+	+	-	-	-
4. Turja	-	-	-	+	-
5. Kolta	-	+	-	-	-
6. Imandra	-	+	-	-	+
8. Aahkkel	+	-	-	-	-
9. Kildin	+	+	-	-	-
10. Kildin	+	+	-	-	-
12. Turia	+	-	-	-	+
14. Turia	-	-	-	-	-
15. Turia	+	-	-	-	-
18. Unknown	+	+	-	-	-
19. Kildin	-	-	-	-	-
20. Kolta	-	-	+	-	-
22. Aahkkel	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	9	7	2	1	2

Table 7. *Mother's response.*

following the story with modern times. The story has several chronological layers reflecting truly primeval conceptions on the one hand and relatively recent conceptions, even from the period of firearms, from the other. The story has an etiological touch. The terms *the freak and the man from heaven* must be the result of misinterpretation by V. Charnoluski, who must have mixed up the words *all'm* [world] and *olma* [man, human].

THE PERIOD OF DIVINITY

The Victim of the Thunder God

The **twenty-fourth** story was first recorded and twice published (in 1877 and 1881; see also the 25th story) by Vassili Nemirovitsh-Dantschenko, a Russian author. It describes how a mountain spirit,

ten pines high, is hunting a large white reindeer with a black head and gold horns with his dogs, which are the size of reindeer. The hunt has been going on for years. When the spirit shoots the first arrow at the reindeer, the earth shakes for the first time. When the “great hunter” shoots the second arrow, the earth will light up in flames, mountains start boiling like water, etc. When the dogs jump on the deer and tear it to pieces and when the hunter drives a knife through its heart, it will be the end of the world.

This variant does not mention Meandash’s name, which first appears in the variant published by V. Charnoluski (see the 25th story). And the name Golden-horn was also attributed to an ancient Nordic deity Heimdall, whom investigators of Scandinavian cultures have connected with rainbows and other natural celestial phenomena (Mifologicheski, 1992: 587–588).

The ending of the 1881 version of the **twenty-fifth** story is longer than that of the 1877 version. It is not certain whether it is an altogether different variant of the story, or whether it was the intention of the recorder to publish the once recorded text in full.

In this variant the great mountain spirit has been called *Aroma-Telle*, but the origin of this name is unknown in Sami mythology. Nikolai Haruzin has assumed that he might have been a thunder god. He compared Aroma-Telle with Aijeke, whom the Scandinavian Sami believed to scare off the fiends with his arrows of lightning. Haruzin argued that the target of Aroma-Telle could have been the giant reindeer from Sami mythology that was trying to escape his pursuers, and drank water from the river as a rainbow. He presumed *a priori* the connection between Aroma-Telle and the Scandinavian thunder god Thor (Haruzin 1890: 148-149).

According to the beliefs of the Finnish Sami, the thunder deity lives in a crevice in a rock (Holmberg 1915: 67). This might be the connecting link between the mountain spirit and the thunder god. In the legends of other cultures thunder gods have also traditionally been associated with mountains.

The aforementioned hunting motif has an interesting analogue in Iranian mythology. The Iranian legend recounts that Mithra, the god of light and sun, was born from a mountain, and he and his

dogs defeated the primeval ox created by Ahuramazda with a knife and a bow. Some researchers argue that this defeat marks the beginning of the new world. Another fight with an ox-like creature will happen before the end of the world. Evil will be burnt in the global fire and a new world born again. According to a Finnish cultural historian Martti Haavio the legend of the ox spread through Germanic soldiers to the provinces of Rome, and during the first centuries AD from there to the Balto-Finnic peoples (cf. *Kalevala* chapter 20).

But M. Haavio was unaware of the analogous legend from the Sami of the Kola peninsula. This stands much closer to the assumed loan source than the Balto-Finnic stories, but is known to include authentic elements. The researcher compared Mithra to Ukko, the Finnish thunder god, who usually appears as the hunter of a large ox or swine, and also to Horagalles of the Sami, whose name originates in the name of the Scandinavian Thor (Haavio 1959: 70-71, 95, 100). Among other peoples thunder has also been associated with fighting. The image originates in the natural phenomenon itself. A thunder god should naturally have a strong opponent. Such legends are etiological in their attempt to explain a powerful natural phenomenon. And even more...

E. Autio argues that the eschatological legend published by V. Nemirovitsh-Dantshenko is partly recent (related to the Revelation of St. John the Divine), and partly ancient, for if there was a legend for the beginning of the world, which the Sami indeed had, there might also have been a story concerning the end of the world (Autio 1993: 17; cf. the Revelations 6, 12-14; 8, 8. 10).

The mythology of the Sami is clearly affected by Germanic mythology. The latter depicts an expressive image of *ragnarök*, where the world comes to an end after the final battle of gods and chthonic creatures with earthquakes and stars falling to earth, etc. (Mifologicheski, 1992: 461). Here the connection between the analogous stories will not be discussed in greater detail.

About the **twenty-sixth** story V. Charnoluski himself has commented that in addition to the collected material he had used the texts published by V. Nemirovitsh-Dantshenko (Charnoluksi 1965: 79). E. Autio believes that V. Charnoluski has named the hunter



Figure 17. The Ukonsaari island in Lake Inari. A drawing by Samuli Paulaharja. After Haavio 1947: 317.

Tiermes, which is also the name of the thunder god of the Sami of the Kola peninsula, after N. Haruzin (Autio 1993: 17), but occurs also as a common noun *tiir'mes'* [thunder]. Some researchers connect the name of Tiermes with that of Thor, while others, beginning with Matias Aleksanteri Castrén (1813–1852) consider it a Finno-Ugric name, comparing it with the name of the Khanty sky god Toorum. But similar names could be found from the Sumerian to the Polynesian cultures (see Masing 1995: 47). The story is related to the legend of the origin of valleys and glades.

The **twenty-seventh** story is only indirectly connected to Meandash, namely through the protagonist of the previous story. It is a narration of the concepts of thunder in the Kola region: the bow of Tiermes (*tiermes-juhs*) is a rainbow. If he draws the bowstring and shoots an arrow (*tiermes-kask*), then the earth moves and an Orthodox Kolta makes a cross-sign and prays: “*Sviet, sviet, sviet!*” Tiermes hunts the fiends and burns down the places where they could be found.

The report also explains that the shaking of the earth is caused by thunder. Thus, it is quite understandable that people familiar with the ancient Nordic concepts and the Bible might regard it as the end of the world. The powerful natural phenomenon obviously made a lasting impression on the Sami. *Sviet* is a word of Russian origin and denotes ‘sacred’ (cf. *siatoi*). As late as in the 1920s the Sami were known to have sacrificed reindeer horns to the thunder god on Ukonsaari (*Aijih-sualui*) island in the middle of Lake Inari (Itkonen 1943/1944: 61). In 1644 Johann Gutsclaff, the minister of

Urvaste parish in Estonia, recorded a prayer to thunder uttered by Jürgen of Vihtla, a peasant from Erastvere who was also known as the Thunder Priest. The prayer informs of sacrificing an ox to the thunder (Suits & Lepik 1932: 120).

The Sami regard thunder as a fighter against fiends, in Christianity also against the devil (see the 28th story). This is a very common belief (Masing 1995: 35, 41). The constant shooting of arrows presumably symbolises an intense battle with an opponent, who must be a negative character particularly for farmers, who believe that thunder brings rain.

Among the Sami, the rainbow is associated with the thunder bow, e.g. the Sami of Lake Inari call it *äijih-tävgi* (Itkonen 1943/1944: 63).

The **twenty-eighth** story includes fragments of belief reports on thunder from a relatively young informant. His parents had considered rainbow a thunder that drinks water from a river or lake and later lets the water pour down as rain. The earlier accounts related that it is a god who runs or flies to escape the devil. The narrator mentioned that the god drove a cart. And the devil chases him to become a master himself. The god has all his possessions in the cart, which would explain the rumbling noise.

The content of the beliefs has somewhat altered in the course of time. Aikes has been unconsciously identified as a rainbow, while earlier it was considered the thunder god's bow that he used to shoot arrows with (cf. also the Estonian word *piksenool* 'the arrow of thunder'). Quite another story is the belief in the rainbow's drinking water and bringing rain. The Sami-Russian dictionary contains a weather-report, which in English might read as follows: "The Rainbow drinks water from the lake, which means that it will bring more rain" (Kuruch 1985: 429).

But then, how can a bow drink water? Apparently, some earlier or different kinds of concepts depicted a hunter with a bow, which, as mentioned above, was identified as a rainbow. And due to this abstraction it came to be called the bow of a sky/thunder god. Thus, a rainbow drinks water from a river or lake. The rainbow is a giant ox. But I will come to that later on.

According to the beliefs of the Inari Sami, the thunder god carries its arrows in a sack on its back (Itkonen 1946: 5). Martti Räsänen claims that in other cultures the thunder god also shoots thunder arrows at evil spirits with a rainbow bow. This is reflected in the names for the rainbow in other languages, cf. to the Finnish *ukonkaari*, Votic *ukoolookka*, Estonian dialectal *ammukaar*, the Uzbek *kamon* denoting ‘arrow’ etc. (Räsänen 1947/1948: 159 – 160, 167; Mifologicheski, 1992: 135, 157, 300, 455, 492).

In the Sami belief the drinking of water is associated with the concept of a giant ox. Similar motifs occur in the traditions of many peoples, among them also the Estonians. The inhabitants of Saaremaa, for instance, believed that a rainbow has a head of an ox drinking water from a river (Holzmayer 1873: 50).

The connection between an ox and drinking is also reflected in the words denoting rainbow in the Perm languages: the Komi-Zyryan *jen-esh* ‘rainbow, ox of the sky’, the Udmurtian *vu-juōs* ‘the water drinker’, etc. The Komi people have also regarded a rainbow as a sun ox (Räsänen 1947/1948: 165; cf. the 29th story). The same motif of drinking from a body of water is common in Eurasia as well as in Africa (Mifologicheski, 1992: 276, 620). The examples from different parts of world indicate a plausible fact that similar analogous concepts are not necessarily loaned.

Is this not therefore the solution to an attempt to identify the reindeer as a thunder god in the example of *Meandash-pyyrre*? Especially when the relative resemblance/relation between the rainbow and the sun is so obvious.

I. Sergin’s account of the devil chasing the god to some extent reflects the original legend, but the roles of the chaser and the chased have been exchanged. God should be the chaser, but no: images of an ancient tribal god with golden horns are much too prevalent. A Sami must be afraid of *Meandash-pyyrre* who tries to escape Tiermes/Aijekes. F. Sergin’s narrative also makes slight references to the prophet Elijah from the Old Testament, whom the Russians and South-Slavonic peoples have traditionally associated with thunder: when thunder rumbles the prophet Elijah is riding his cart in heaven (Mifologicheski, 1992: 240).

To conclude the subject of the thunder god. At least five reports of Meandash also mention the thunder god. The three eschatological Sami variants discussed above are multi-layered. The authentic concepts that have arisen from the powerful natural phenomenon have intermingled with the Mithra story of the Iranian tradition and the Scandinavian *ragnarök*. During the period of Christianisation it has been affected by the Biblical images of the approaching end of the world. In addition to that, the collectors-authors have edited the material for literary purposes. The motif of a thunder bow, born from nature, is common in many cultures, including the Sami. This is also were the motif of battle originates. The rainbow is both the bow of the thunder god and his ox.

The Sun god

The **twenty-ninth** story describes the snowy gold-horned reindeer *Meandash-pyyrre* as a sun, which was the beginning of Kola and life. He was the beginning of pastures. *Meandash-pyyrre* flies out of the earth, from one side of the land (the Imandra region) to the other. In the place for sacrifices he urinated on the ground and thus made it fertile. He dropped his golden horn and said: “Here is the tundra of Meandash!”

Regretfully, the story has no versions. Therefore we cannot be certain of the authenticity of its contents. Reference to the beginning of the Sun’s journey suggests that the entire story cannot originate

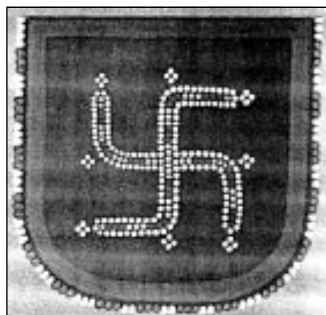


Figure 18. An ornament of the Sami. After Haruzin 1890. In the ancient religion of several peoples the swastika is the symbol of sun. (Cooper 1986: 188).

from the Turia people (V. Charnoluski’s argument supports this idea; 1965: 76), but from Monntsh, west of Imandra, a place connected with P.Sarvanov. Providing that the beginning of the folk tale has not spread to Turia and been established in the tradition at an earlier time, the hypothesis might be well-grounded. The story mentions that the Sun reindeer rises from the other side of Norway, i.e. from the west. This presents more questions for consideration. Perhaps the narrator has also mentioned the sun’s return along its

underground course: otherwise, how could it rise from the east every morning? We must remember that V. Charnoluski was not fully competent in the Sami language, and thus he might have missed some information. On the other hand, his mention of several toponyms of Eastern Kola (*Siivn, Keiva, Kintush*, among them even the specific *Low Lake*), allows us to assume that one of his informants might have been a local inhabitant. The beginning of another (the 26th) story “*From the other side of Norway, from the other side of faraway Limandry (=Imandra), where the other world begins*” (Charnoluski 1965: 80), which reportedly has been uttered by a Turia, is consistent with the legend, as in the traditions of many nations the other world is situated in the west, where the sun sets.

Thus the legend of the sun reindeer has different sources. This is not very surprising, as the story of the thunder reindeer has also been combined from different sources (see the 25th story), as the publisher himself has admitted. Besides, the origin of P.Sarvanov, the language guide, is also uncertain.

The legend under discussion, providing it is authentic, is a classic example of how a sun god has been born from a tribal god, its ancestors and the reindeer fairy. In the Arctic regions, the sun has always been considered extremely important. In other regions the worship of the sun is first and foremost related

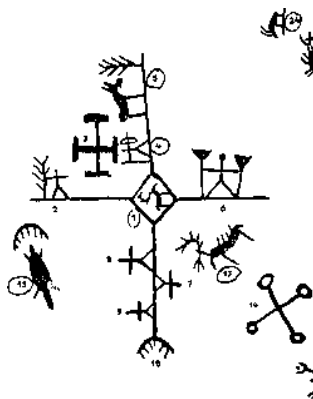


Figure 19. The central part of a shaman drum from the early 17th century. After Kjellström 1991: 112. Drawing parallels with the previous illustration allows us to consider the reindeer figure a symbol of sun. The reindeer depicted in front of the bow-hunter might symbolise the victim of thunder god.



Figure 20. The sun deer of the Tagar culture in Kuzbass. From the 1st millennium BC. After Okladnikov, Martynov 1972: 223.

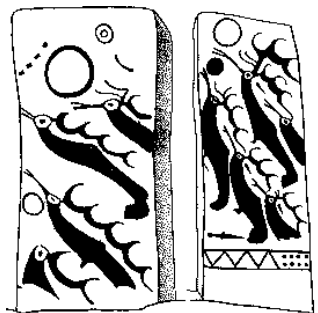


Figure 21. Deer stones with symbols of sun and what are presumably flying deer. After Okladnikov, Martõnov 1972: 226.

to the belief of land-tilling cultures. The Kolta have a legend in which the sun goes its course by riding on the back of a bear in the morning, a reindeer at noon and a reindeer cow in the evening (Itkonen 1946: 8). *Meandash-pyyrre* was not just the symbol of the sun, but the symbol of the whole universe (Autio 1993: 65).

A deer with golden-horns, which obviously symbolised the sun, was known in the whole region stretching from the plains of the Danube River to the Mongolian deserts. This motif is depicted in the marvelous bronze imitations of the

Scythian and Tagarian flying deer; the numerous supposedly flying creatures and solar symbols depicted on the Mongolian deer stones are also remarkable. During recent periods, the motif of deer (moose/reindeer/deer) has been substituted with a horse (Okladnikov & Martynov 1972: 222 –229).

According to Kildin Sami Galina Sharshina, the earthly golden reindeer is a symbol of wealth. On a certain day the reindeer might run towards a human with a ringing bell around its neck. If its fur is stroked, the reindeer starts dropping gold. It must not be stroked too much, as the gold might turn to iron (Szabò 1967: 44-45).

According to the dictionary, the word combination *Meanta'-bpyrre* denotes the (reindeer) prey, instead of *Meandash* the good, or a helper (see Itkonen 1958: 245). Thus, V. Charnoluski appears to have misunderstood the expression, which is proved also by an extract from his travel journals (see Charnoluski 1965: 67).

The golden-horned sun reindeer has been depicted as snowy white. According to literary sources the Sami valued white reindeer highly. Both the Sami and other Nordic peoples preferred to sacrifice white reindeer to the sun (Itkonen 1960: 127, 129, 130, 131).

The present folk tale reveals that *Meandash* settled in the region where people made him offerings. V. Charnoluski reported that the

heights called *Oajmkedzhpalla* in the legend had two sacred natural remnants (Charnoluski 1972: 41). Meandash urinated at the site of the offering. This concept might originate in the fact that in such places the hay grew thicker as it was fertilised with nitrogen from urine. The connection between sun and the growth of hay is mentioned in another report from the Sami around Lake Inari: in summer they had said a prayer to the sun, asking it to grow hay; for that they made a figure of the sun surrounded by a fence of horns (*tshoarve-kärđi*) (Itkonen 1943/1944: 64). A figure dating back to the 17th century shows how horns were placed in a semi-circle around a seita-stone, this might have been the fence mentioned above.

The folk tale in question reveals the connection between the dropped horn and the pastures with rich hay, where the reindeer prefer to stay so that hunters could catch them. V. Charnoluski must have been guided by the same principle, as his rendition of the horn was the mythic *tshuorv-tshulta* (also *tshuarrv-tshuolt*) ‘horn stake’ of the Sami, which could be used for tying down reindeer herds in a symbolical sense (see Charnoluski 1972: 42). In the beliefs of different cultures horns are symbols of wealth, fertility, divine power and other positive things (Cooper 1986: 82).

Translated by Kait Realo

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