

A.A. Badmaev

*Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography,
Siberian Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences,
Pr. Akademika Lavrentieva 17, Novosibirsk, 630090, Russia
E-mail: badmaevaa@ngs.ru*

Cattle in Buryat Mythology and Ritual

This study addresses, on the basis of ethnographic, folkloric, linguistic, and field data, the role of cattle in Buryat myths and rites, with reference to their economic significance. Buryat words relating to the exteriors of animals, sex differences, etc. are listed. The bull image features in traditional Buryat systems of time calculation and in the tradition of giving protective names homonymical to words denoting the bull are described. Mythological beliefs concerning the cattle are analyzed. The Bulagats, a major Buryat subgroup, practiced the tribal cult of Bukha-noyon, to whom the bull alluded. This practice was connected with the idea of shape-shifting, whereby the bull symbolized the male principle. In terms of cosmogony, the bull was part of habitation spheres such as sky, earth, and water, and their elements such as celestial bodies and mountains, and fire. The positive attitude to the bull and the cow was mirrored by views regarding supernatural properties of bull hair and urine, cow's milk and placenta, and devices used for managing draft bulls (the yoke and the hair rope zele). At the same time, the cattle were associated with the Lower World and its inhabitants; they functioned as mediators and could symbolize death. A detailed description of the bull image in traditional Buryat ritualism is provided.

Keywords: *Buryats, traditional worldview, shamanism, cattle, folklore, ritual.*

Introduction

The domestication of cattle in the Trans-Baikal region began in the Late Neolithic. In the Chalcolithic, with the emergence of a productive economy, cattle-breeding spread to the northernmost territories in the forest-steppe belt of the subregion, which is evidenced by the finds from the settlements of Kharga I, Dvortsy, and Fofanovo burial ground (grave No. 20) (Tsybiktarov, 1999: 73, 94). By the beginning of the Late Bronze Age, cattle-breeding had become the main economic activity of the population inhabiting the steppe belt of the Trans-Baikal region. Later, the tradition of cattle-breeding spread into the Baikalia and Cis-Baikal

region. In southeastern Siberia, it has survived until the ethnographically modern period.

The role of cattle in the economic life of the inhabitants of this region has always been significant, and became reflected in the traditional worldview and ritual practices of the Buryats. At present, mythological beliefs and rituals exist in the Buryat culture in a reduced form, which makes it relevant to reconstruct traditional knowledge: for example, concerning the interaction of humans with the animal world, a prominent representative of which is cattle. The images of the bull and cow have not yet been the topic of special study in Buryat ethnography. This article analyzes the images of cattle in the traditional

culture of the Buryats, describes Buryat beliefs regarding bulls and cows, establishes the set of traditional Buryat concepts relating to these animals, and identifies the role of cattle in Buryat rituals. The sources are ethnographic, folkloric, linguistic, and field materials; in particular, ethnographic and folklore data obtained by S.P. Baldaev, P.P. Batorov, N.S. Boldonov, G.M. Osokin, Y.S. Smolev, M.N. Khangalov, and P.P. Khoroshikh. This research followed the structural-semiotic methodology.

General description of Buryat beliefs about cattle

The breeding of cows and bulls played an important role in the animal husbandry of the Buryats. The aboriginal (meat and dairy) cattle breed for pasture-keeping, which was distinguished by short stature, was traditional for the Buryats. With low milk-yield, cows of this breed gave milk of increased fat content, and when they were slaughtered, people obtained large amount of meat and lard. Keeping bulls and cows satisfied the main needs of the population not only for meat and milk, but also for raw materials for manufacturing clothing, footwear, horse equipment, utensils, etc. Selling live cattle and curried cow- and sheep-skins on the market was an important source of family income. Oxen were usually used as means of transportation; until the 19th century, the Buryats transported goods on a cart with two high wheels on a fixed axle *ukher terge* ‘bull cart, araba’; later, on a four-wheeled peasant cart adopted from the Russians (Badmaev, 1997: 86). Cattle were not used as riding animals.

The traditional fuel among the Buryats was *argal*, ‘dry cattle manure’. This was even preferred to firewood: it was believed that the smoke released during its burning had aseptic properties and purified the premises (FMA). For obtaining high grass stand, the Buryats fertilized *utug* (*uteg*, ‘artificial grassland’) with cow manure. Crushed *argal* served as warm bedding for women in labor, and for livestock when kept in its stall. Fresh cow manure was used as a coating in the construction of log yurts and utility buildings. Naturally, the important role of these animals in the economic life of the Buryats was reflected in their mythological concepts.

According to the Buryats, a family was prosperous if it had its own livestock. So, in the traditional Buryat society, wealthy families of cattle breeders were assigned a very high status. This mental attitude can be seen in epic poems, where warrior-heroes appear as owners of countless herds of cattle.

In the Buryat language, there are common names for domestic cattle – *mal* ‘cattle’ and *eber huulten* ‘with horns and tail’ (Buryaad-oroḍ toli..., 2010: Vol. II, 645); the latter name reflects the main morphological features of cattle: *eber* ‘horn’ and *huul* ‘tail’. The archaic meaning of the phrase *eber huulten* ‘noble people of the family clan’ indicates that livestock (cows, goats, and sheep) was the main wealth of a Buryat nomad, in addition to horses.

The vocabulary of the Buryats contains the words that convey the differences between animals by sex: *bukha* ‘stud bull’ and *yneen* ‘cow’. Other meanings of the word *bukha*, such as ‘mighty, huge’ (Buryaad-oroḍ toli..., 2010: Vol. I, 160), should be considered attributes of a bull; they show that the Buryats associated this animal with great physical strength. The Buryat language has a generic name for cattle—*ukher mal*. The word *ukher* was used in the narrow sense of ‘cow, ox, castrated bull’ (Buryaad-oroḍ toli..., 2010: Vol. II, 358).

The Buryats especially appreciated such qualities of the local breed of cattle as strength, fearlessness (when wolves attacked, cows usually protected the calves), resistance to adverse conditions, and easy maintenance. The Buryat vocabulary mentions excessive stubbornness as a typical feature of these animals: *Ykherei shekhende uhashye shudkha, tohoshye shudha – sessenshye bolokhogui, tenegshye bolkhogyi* ‘You may pour water or oil into the ears of cattle, they will still not become wise nor stupid’ (Ibid.). Clumsiness and awkwardness in movement were associated with the image of the bull: *Ykher zhoroo* ‘bull’s racing pace’ (Ibid.).

In riddles, the emphasis was placed on the presence of horns and ears in cattle: *Urayhan durben khun eree, khoyoryn dakhatai, khoyoryn dakhaugei* ‘Four men came from the south, two of them wearing fur coats, two without fur coats (two horns of a cow and two ears)’ (Folklor..., 1999: 118, 120); *Urdahaa durben khun erebe: khoyoryn duutai, khoeryn duugui nyusegeen* ‘Four came from the south, and with them two with voices, and two without voice and naked (cattle, its ears, and horns)’ (Boldonov, 1949: 122–123). Cattle were identified with needle (obviously, an indication of the presence of horns) and heart: *Khukhe ukher duree sheree* ‘gray bull drags its rope’ (needle with thread) (Folklor..., 1999: 118, 121); *Ulaakhan buruu sagaan boltorgotoi* ‘red calf with a white collar’ (heart) (Boldonov, 1949: 124–125).

The Buryat language includes words that designate various sounds made by cattle: *zokhodoon* ‘shrill, lingering mooing (of a bull)’, *mooroon* ‘mooing (of cows and calves)’.

The important economic and symbolic role of cattle is reflected in the popular calendar. The Buryats adhered

to a twelve-year cycle, with each year corresponding to specific animal—sign of the zodiac; the cycle included *ukher zhel* ‘year of the bull/ox’. Their calendar, which took into account changes of lunar phase, distinguished *ukher hara* ‘month of the bull/ox’; the time of the day included *ukher sag* ‘hour of the bull/ox’ (hence, in the space of the yurt, divided into twelve zones, according to the astrological signs, there was a specific area under the sign of the bull).

It was customary among the Buryats to give children protective names homonymous with names of cattle, while performing the ritual of naming. The circle of such nominations is quite extensive: *Moorogshoon* ‘mooring (bull)’, *Boodee* ‘cow’, *Bukha* ‘bull’, *Buruu(n)* ‘one-year-old calf’, *Tugal* ‘calf’, *Yneen* ‘cow’; *Ykher*, *Nalbai* ‘cow that ceased to give milk’, and *Mukhar* ‘hornless cow’ (Mitroshkina, 1987: 60, 79–80).

Cattle in the mythological beliefs of the Buryats

Ethnographic evidence indicates that the Buryats had an archaic cult of the bull associated with veneration of *Bukha-noyon* ‘Lord Bull’, who was one of the shamanic “thirteen northern rulers”, especially revered by the main ethnic subdivisions of the Buryats—the Bulagats, Ekhirits, Khongodars, and Khori Buryats. This mythical character is present in the genealogical tradition of the Bulagats; as a legend says, their ancestor was nourished by a divine animal: “The boy was named Bulagat (Bulagat found in the pit of a stud bull)” (Baldaev, 2009: 40).

The Buryats believed that cattle could be conductors of the celestial dwellers’ will. This is mentioned in one of the legends: “In the upper part of the Murin valley, they (the Buryats) came across the tracks of a cow and a stud bull. Following the tracks, they came to the valley of the Buguldeika River, where they found them. Kheree and his relatives considered this a special indication of the *tengrins* [*tengeri* ‘celestial dweller’ – A.B.]” (Ibid.: 56). This function of cattle is manifested in the ritual of dedicating an animal to the mythical master-spirit or deity: the will of the supreme being and his benevolence towards the local ethnic community was revealed through a specially selected bull (or horse).

According to the beliefs of the Buryats, the bull symbolized the mythical progenitor of the Bulagats *Bukha-noyon*; therefore, a dream in which a person saw himself riding a bull was perceived as a good sign (Khangalov, 1958: Vol. I, 395).

The idea of shape-shifting was also associated with *Bukha-noyon*: initially, this character was in human

form, but when he was bitten on the leg by the yellow dog *Gurab shara*, as instigated by the daughter of *Tayzhi-khan*, he “became defiled, unclean, and thereby lost the ability to become a human again” (Baldaev, 2009: 330). Notably, the shamanic poetry of the Buryats contains some plots about the transformation of a shaman into a bull, for a mystical fight with another shaman. However, in the Buryat tradition, the bull, unlike the horse, eagle, and some other animals, was not an assisting spirit—a riding animal for shaman’s travels to the other worlds.

The image of bull among the Buryats was a symbol of the masculine principle, great physical strength. It is no coincidence that military valor was associated with this animal. For example, in the epics of the Buryats, the fighting of warrior-heroes is usually compared with the fighting of bulls:

He circled around with the mangadkhai...
They spin one after another,
They squint at each other,
Like bulls ready to butt each other

(Sharakhshinova, 2000: 152).

When describing the struggle of epic heroes, the expressions “bull’s neck” and “bull’s throat”, emphasizing their power, are often used:

In Shar Khasar, the warrior and knight,
The heart leaped,
His body became lax and sleepy,
His thick neck is about to bend down,
His bull’s throat is about to tear apart...

(Geser..., 1986: Vol. I, 57).

The cosmogonic concept of the connection between the bull and various spheres of habitation and their objects is manifested in the traditional worldview of the Buryats. The celestial symbolism of this animal is reflected in the myth of the struggle between two stud bulls, earthly incarnations of the sons of the celestial polar powers—*Bokho-Muya* (revered as *Bukha-noyon*), the son of the western celestial dweller *Zayan-sagan-tengeri*, and *Bokho-Teli*, the son of the eastern celestial dweller *Khamkhir-bogdo*. According to *Khangalov*, the blue stud bull, which *Bokho-Muya* turned into, personified the daytime sky and was associated with the sun, while the multicolored bull, the hypostasis of *Bokho-Teli*, symbolized the night, starry sky, and another luminary—the moon (1958: 322). The very confrontation between the bulls was associated with a natural phenomenon—the solar eclipse (Ibid.: 323), and the victory of *Bukha-noyon* over the enemy was perceived as a triumph of the forces of light.

The motive of the bull's relation to earth can be observed in the folklore of the Buryats; in particular, in the riddle of snow and earth: *Sagaan ukheryn yaby gee, khara ukheryn baiey gee* 'the white bull called to go, the black bull asked to stay' (Folklor..., 1999: 117, 120). In addition, the image of this animal was identified with a mountain. This idea was most vividly embodied in the image of Bukha-noyon, who, as a legend says, turned into a two-horned mountain near the village of Tory, in the Tunkin Depression (Potanin, 1883: 264). In the 18th century, the Bulagats performed collective rituals of sacrifice at such a shamanic stone, addressing Bukha-noyon as the supreme judge (Miller, 2009: 171). This mythical character was associated with the two-horned mountain *Ykher Mankhai* 'bull's head' in the Kuda River valley (the Lower Angara region), which was the place of tribal sacrifice of the Bulagats after their forced migration from Tunka. Obviously, these mountain peaks were not chosen a sacred place at random—in their shape they remotely resembled a bull's head with horns.

The image of a bull—the spirit of the earth—is quite widespread in the culture of the peoples of Eurasia. For example, in the folklore of the Altaians, it is represented as follows:

A horse with its winged back
Crouched to the ground, and instantly appeared
The master – spirit of the native land –
Seven-year-old bull, red bull

(Altaiskie geroicheskiye skazaniya,
1983: 233).

In one Buryat riddle, the image of a lying bull is associated with the fire element: *Khukhe ukher khebten targalaa* 'the lying gray bull grew fat' (ash) (Folklor..., 1999: 117, 119).

Changes in the behavior of the cattle were perceived by the Buryats as signs of approaching bad weather. On the basis of observations, popular signs emerged: "If cattle wander sadly around the field or huddle under trees, it will be rain and thunderstorm"; "If cows wave their tails, it will be thunderstorm"; "If cows stand all day in the bushes, it will be hail" (Osokin, 1906: 224–225); "If calves run with their tails raised, rain is expected" (Smolev, 1900: 30). It seems that the Buryats, although not directly, associated cattle with the water element. This may explain their practice of using cows in searching for groundwater (Baldaev, 2010: 48–49). The mythological consciousness of other Mongolian peoples also reveals some idea of cattle's belonging to the water element, for example, the Khalkha people: "The Khalkha believe that the water cow *usunai argamyk*, who screams at night, lives in large lakes,

such as Ubsa and Tirzhin-Tsagan (from which the Chilotu flows)" (Potanin, 1881: 98).

In the epics, fairy tales, shamanic poetry, and rituals of the Buryats, special importance was given to the symbolism of an animal's color. Among the Cis-Baikal Buryats, this symbolism manifested itself in dedicating bulls of different colors to celestial dwellers who belonged to opposite camps: red-colored bulls were intended for black, eastern *tengerias* (probably, this color was a hint of the "nine bloody skies"—habitation place of these celestial dwellers in the epics), while gray bulls were intended for white, western celestial dwellers (Khangalov, 1958: Vol. I, 294, 359). In the epics "Geser", this symbolism is shown using the example of stud bulls of the heads of western and eastern skies:

Bluish-multicolored bull of Khan Khurmas...
Brownish-red bull of Atai Ulaan

(Geser..., 1986: Vol. I, 45–46).

Notably, the requirements for the color of the bull-*seter* (*seter(tei)* 'dedicated animal') varied among different groups of the Buryats: among the Cis-Baikal Buryats, any two-year-old bull, with the exception of a piebald one or one without a brand, was accepted as a *seter* (Batorov, Khoroshikh, 1926: 59); while in the ritual of dedication among the modern Sayan Buryats, the color of the animal is irrelevant (FMA), most likely because of the partial loss of tradition. The dedicated bull was regarded as a driving animal for the deities and a talisman for the household livestock.

In the fairy-tale prose of the Buryats, the color of the bull often identifies it with a specific area of habitation. For example, in the fairy tale "Tugal Masan", the contrasting colors of bulls opposed in a fight signify their belonging to opposite worlds: white bulls make up the army of the celestial king, while black bulls make up the army of the sea lord Khara Lusan-Khan (Buryatskiye volshebnye skazki, 1993: 199).

The positive connotation of the bull and cow is manifested in beliefs concerning the supernatural properties of bovine wool and urine, and the cow's milk and placenta, as well as household items associated with these animals. For instance, the Buryats believed that bull's wool had a protective function. According to the materials of Khangalov, "the soul can take refuge... in the wool of a stud bull dedicated to Bukha-noyon" (1958: Vol. I, 396). Notable in this case is the person of Bukha-noyon, who, as a mythical patron, could give a person's soul a refuge from evil spirits.

According to Buryat beliefs, milk from domestic animals, including cows, possessed sacred properties: it was a part of the ritual "white food", which was

offered to guests, and was a sacrifice to the gods and master-spirits, including the mythical masters of the home fire; the milk was sprinkled to the sacred birds flying by (eagle, swan, etc.). This drink was associated with the life principle and fertility; therefore, it was incorporated into childbirth and wedding ceremonies. The white color of milk, among the Buryats, symbolizes purity and sinlessness, a connection with white western celestial dwellers, and carries celestial semantics.

In the Buryats' beliefs, the natural secretions of bulls could also be endowed with sacred qualities; in a mythologized form, this was manifested in the image of Bukha-noyon, from whose urine silver-fir forest and juniper grew (Khangalov, 1958: Vol. I, 324) (in the Buryat culture, silver-fir and juniper have a sacred meaning). The cow's placenta (*khag*) was considered a protective talisman for cows; it was hung in yurts, so the cows would always find their way home (Batorov, Khoroshikh, 1926: 59).

It is worth mentioning that the peoples of Central and South Asia use cow's milk and dairy products, as well as cattle manure, for various purposes. Hinduism distinguishes *panchagavya*—five useful products obtained from a cow—milk, cottage cheese, clarified butter (or *ghee*), urine, and manure, which, among other things, have religious and medicinal purposes (Krishna, 2010: 83). The Hindus consumed milk and these dairy products as *prasada*—ritual food, a symbol of divine grace. Apparently, both the Indian tradition of *panchagavya* and the similar practice of the Buryats discussed above originated from the Bronze Age, when cattle-breeding became widespread in various regions of Eurasia.

The image of the bull was identified with fertility, the symbol of which was considered to be a piece of harness, such as wooden yoke. It is associated with a belief: if a woman steps over the yoke, she will become pregnant. "Today, the Buryats consider it a great sin if a girl or married woman steps over a yoke of the cart" (Khangalov, 1959: Vol. II, 124).

In popular consciousness, magical protection was provided by the *zele*—a horsehair rope, decorated with black and white ribbons, to which calves were tied. According to Buryat beliefs, horses carried solar symbolism; the horse's mane and tail, from which the rope was made, were believed to protect cattle from evil spirits and chthonic creatures (e.g., snakes). The mythical patron of such a rope was called the owner of the "multicolored" taiga Zerlik-noyon (Khangalov, 1958: Vol. I, 307). According to the materials of Khangalov, the keeper of such a hair rope was also considered to be *Zeleshe-khatun* 'lady of zele', who

was believed to be a patron of dairy farming among the Buryats (Ibid.: 228).

Since the Buryats believed that cattle were a guide to the other world, they developed some beliefs about cattle's demonic nature. Notably, the word *ukher* is derived from *ukhekhe* 'to die' (Buryaad-orod toli..., 2010: Vol. II, 359). In this regard, it should be pointed out that shamanic poems mention *Ykher khara* 'black bull/ox' (although one may assume another spelling of the name of this character—*Ykheer khara* 'black dead man') among the "scribes" of the ruler of the afterlife Erlen-Khan. In shamanic folklore, the demonic creature *oroolon* 'shape-shifter, ghoul, vampire' (Ibid.: 44) turns at nights into an erect, hornless, and tailless cow, and attacks the lonely traveler. Belonging to the Lower World was emphasized by the presence of bull's features in the character. For example, Erlen-Khan was described as a creature with human body, but with bull's head (Mify..., 1980: 1123–1124). According to a legend, the black shaman Som-Sanan-noyon after his death became the servant of Erlen-Khan, and acquired a new appearance: "He remained a man, but horns grew on his head, and large hooves grew on his feet" (Khangalov, 1959: Vol. II, 123). Similar ideas have been recorded among other peoples of southern Siberia and Central Asia. For instance, the Khakass evidence shows the bull symbolism of the ruler of the underworld Erlik-Khan and his servants (Burnakov, 2019: 16).

According to Buryat beliefs, the cow as a guide to the afterlife was endowed with the gift of foreseeing impending danger. The people said: "If a cow moos at night, there will be thieves" (Smolev, 1900: 28). Moreover, the cow carried the symbolism of death, as the following popular signs show: "If a cow jumps over a fur coat hung on a fence, death will come to the person whose fur coat it is"; "If cows butt and their horns become entwined, someone will die"; "If a cow butts a yurt, the deceased will be the housewife" (Ibid.: 27–28). As one may see, these signs reflect strange behaviors of the animal, which is more typical of the animal of the opposite sex—the bull. A cow's habits that went beyond normal behavior were viewed as a bad sign: "It's bad when a cow walks behind a bull or jumps on it" (Natsov, 1995: 114).

Buryats treated the birth of a pair of calves from a cow with contempt: "If a cow brings forth two calves, there will be trouble; for getting rid of this, one needs to slaughter one calf at the place where *two or three roads* converge [my italics – A.B.], and then bury it in the same place" (Smolev, 1900: 28). Obviously, one of the newborn calves was viewed as unclean creature and was subject to mortification. Noteworthy is the burial

place of such an animal—a crossroad. According to the beliefs of the Buryats, the rampant servants of Erlen-Khan *albans* ('demons, evil spirits') or "the three road ones" (spirit-messengers of the lord of the underworld) moved along the road at nights, and meeting with them allegedly ended up with death of the person. In addition, crossroads were perceived as a kind of passage to the Lower World.

The Buryats considered the mythical character *zayaashan* 'savior, miracle worker' to be a protector of the household livestock: "Rich people have also a rich *zayashi*. He rides a good horse, wears good clothes, and holds a lasso (*bugulya*) in his hand, and looks after the herds of horses and cattle, so they will not get lost and killed by the beasts" (Khangalov, 1960: Vol. III, 44). Apart from *zayaashan*, the following local protectors of cattle are known among the Buryats of the Cis-Baikal clans: Buzele, Bizyale, Atuikhan, Shatuikhan, Ishegikhen, Orhogkhen, Nugan-Ezinud (*Nuga Ezenuud* 'mistresses of the meadow'). Image-*ongons* (Boronkhi ongon, Tugal-buruunei ongon, Gerei ongon, Nuga Ezenuud ongon, etc.) and feeding-rituals were dedicated to them (Batorov, Khoroshikh, 1926: 57, 58, 59). Ukhaa Solbon was considered to be celestial patron of cattle and horses (Geser..., 1986: Vol. I, 52), Guzhir-tengri (*Guzher tengeri* 'tireless celestial dweller') was protector of bulls (Batorov, Khoroshikh, 1926: 59), and Bukha-noyon was keeper of the corral. All this indicates the emergence of a hierarchy of mythical protectors of bulls and cows among the Buryats.

The pantheon of patrons of cattle among the Buryats reflects the habitation of these animals—in the warm season, they were grazed on pastures (in the steppe, in the meadow, sometimes at the edge of the forest, or in a grove); in cold weather, they were kept in corrals or in a stable. Since birth, calves were in the people's cultural space: at first, in the front part of the yurt, then in a warm calf shed. Adult animals were also in the domesticated space (corral or stable), but their pastures belonged to alien, undomesticated space. The Buryats "coordinated" the presence of bulls and cows in each of the indicated locations with the master spirit of this place: they honored him by offering periodic ritual treats.

Cattle in Buryat ritual

Cattle were included in the traditional family and clan rites of the Buryats, performing the functions of an attribute of gift exchange in the childbirth or wedding ritual, a posthumous riding animal, an animal dedicated to master-spirits and deities, and sacrifice.

Having symbolic meaning and material value, cattle were an important object of gift exchange. In the rituals of the life cycle, cattle acted as gift (*kharyuu*) requiring a gift in return. For example, in the *milaanguud* rite, when a child was one month or one year old (age definitions differed among different groups of the Buryats), the guests presented him with calves—personal cattle. In wedding rites, cattle were an obligatory part of the traditional bride-price and dowry (*enzhe*) of the bride.

These cattle were also included in the burial rituals of the Buryats: during the burial of a poor man, the bull (ox) replaced the *khoilgo* horse on which the deceased was usually taken to the burial place (Khangalov, 1958: Vol. I, 224). In the old days, such animal was killed at the grave; it was believed that it would accompany the deceased in the afterlife.

In traditional clan rituals of the Buryats, bulls acted as animals dedicated to the gods or as a sacrifice to them. As was mentioned above, such animal had to be of a specific color. Furthermore, attention was paid to its physical condition (integrity of hooves and horns), and to the absence of a property brand-mark *tamga* on its body.

We should mention that unlike other farm animals, adult bulls and cows were not sacrificed among the Buryats. According to Khangalov, among the Cis-Baikal Buryats, the ritual of *Ylgyde oruulkha* 'put into the cradle (of a child)' was known, in which a bull-calf was sacrificed to Bukha-noyon (Ibid.: 213). This rite corresponded to an old tradition that is mentioned in the legend about Bulagat: only by slaughtering a two-year-old white bull was the shaman lady Asuikhan able to open the cradle with a newborn Bulagat, fettered with iron belts (Potanin, 1883: 268). Some of the Upper Lena Buryats have a custom of eating *uusyn myakhan* 'meat from the autumn slaughtering' (beef saved for the winter) as a ritual food (Khandagurova, 2008: 73–74), but this meat and the sacrificial animal's meat are not the same thing.

Different groups of Buryats had rituals associated with magical protection of cattle. During the anthrax epidemic, the Cis-Baikal Buryats performed the ritual of fumigating the cattle with the smoke of juniper, driving the cattle past the fire—*Shurge shuukhe* 'to purify through the gates', based on the views of the cleansing power of fire (celestial fire) obtained by friction, from a tree broken by lightning (Batorov, Khoroshikh, 1926: 54–55).

For preventing the death of cattle, the Buryats of the Ekhirit-Bulagat clans performed the sacrificial ritual *Khara, uta, boro mongolnuudte* 'to the black, long, and gray Mongols' (Ibid.: 55)—to master-spirits

living in the posts of fences and in various places of the courtyard. It was believed that if one did not make a sacrifice to these spirits, they would torment cows and calves, and even send diseases to family members (Khandagurova, 2008: 40). In case of illness of bulls or cows, Buryat shamanists make image-ongons to the mythical patrons of cattle and dedicate the rituals of feeding “white” food—dairy products, milk vodka, and *salamat* (boiled wheat flour porridge)—to them.

For treating cattle, the Buryats used magic techniques. It was believed that for curing a cow of bloating, a whisk should be put to its stomach and rotated, and a special incantation should be pronounced. For healing mastitis, one had to scratch the inflamed place with a right front bear paw and growl like a bear (Batorov, Khoroshikh, 1926: 52). The items used in this “treatment” performed an apotropaic function; healing was based on the idea of the supernatural properties of a whisk and a bear’s paw (bear was a revered animal in Buryat culture).

The use of the image of bull in the ritual practice of Buryat shamans is explained by the fact that people believed in the supernatural abilities of this animal. Shamanic attributes included the image of bull on the ongons dedicated to the mythical ruler of the waters Ukhan-Khan and to other master-spirits—*Zuraktan* ‘painted’. They also contained the figures of camel, eagle, frog, and snake (Khangalov, 1958: Vol. I, 327). These zoomorphic characters personified the three habitation realms—sky, earth, and water—and were regarded as shaman’s assisting spirits.

During the clan sacrifice (*tailagan*) of the Bulagats, when invoking white, western celestial dwellers, the shaman performed the ritual of *ongo oruulkha* ‘let the spirit enter’: entering into ecstasy, he “let in himself” the spirit of Bukha-noyon and at the same time he got down on all fours and behaved like a bull (Ibid.: 521–522).

Conclusions

This study has shown that the semantics of the images of cattle among the Buryats is quite diverse. In the mythological beliefs of the Buryats, bull and cow possess ambivalent connotation. There is a respectful attitude towards these animals due to their positive connotation. Manifestations of such attitude are the cult of Bukha-noyon—the mythical ancestor of the Bulagats; concepts about the connection of cattle with sky and earth, as well as their objects (celestial bodies, mountains), water and fire elements; beliefs about cattle as conductors of the will of benevolent

celestial inhabitants and about the bull as a symbol of fertility; sacralization of bull fur and urine, cow milk and placenta, bull yoke and hair rope *zele*; motive of shape-shifting of a human into bull; rituals aimed at protecting and curing cattle; and perception of bulls as animals dedicated to gods. At the same time, cattle also had negative connotations. They were associated with the Lower World and its inhabitants, acting as a mediator between the worlds, as a predictor, and carried the symbolism of death. For this reason, the bull was included in shamanic rites, and its images were a part of shamanic ritual attributes.

Acknowledgement

This study was performed under the R&D Project “Symbol and Sign in the Culture of the Peoples of Siberia in the 17th to 21st Centuries: Actualization and Strategies of Maintenance”.

References

- Altaiskiye geroicheskiye skazaniya. 1983**
A. Kalkin (narr.), A. Plitchenko (transl.). Moscow: Sovremennik.
- Badmaev A.A. 1997**
Remesla aginskikh buryat (k probleme etnokulturnykh kontaktov). Novosibirsk: Izd. IAET SO RAN.
- Baldaev S.P. 2009**
Rodoslovnye predaniya i legendy buryat, A.I. Ulanov (ed.), pt. I. 2nd ed. Ulan-Ude: Izd. Bur. Gos. Univ.
- Baldaev S.P. 2010**
Rodoslovnye predaniya i legendy buryat. Zabaikalskie buryaty, T.E. Sanzhieva (ed., comp.). Ulan-Ude: Izd. Bur. Gos. Univ.
- Batorov P.P., Khoroshikh P.P. 1926**
Materialy po narodnomu skotolecheniyu irkutskikh buryat. *Buryatovedcheskiy sbornik*, iss. 2: 50–59.
- Boldonov N.S. 1949**
Zagadki buryat-mongolov: iz starinnogo sbornika Kharbasarova. In *Sbornik trudov po filologii*. Ulan-Ude: Burmangiz, pp. 120–125.
- Burnakov V.A. 2019**
Byk kak voploshcheniye demonicheskogo nachala v traditsionnykh verovaniyakh i folklоре khakasov (konets XIX – seredina XX v.). *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Kulturologiya i iskusstvovedenie*, No. 33: 15–33.
- Buryaad-oroḍ toli. Buryatsko-russkiy slovar. 2010**
K.M. Cheremisov, L.D. Shagdarov (comp.). In 2 vols. Ulan-Ude: [Respublik. tip.].
- Buryatskiye volshebnye skazki. 1993**
E.V. Barannikova, S.S. Bardakhanova, V.S. Gungarov (comp.). Novosibirsk: Nauka. (Pamyatniki folklora narodov Sibiri i Dalnego Vostoka; vol. 5).
- Folklor Kurumchinskoi doliny. 1999**
Ulan-Ude: Izd. BNC SO RAN.
- Geser. Buryatskiy narodnyi geroicheskiy epos. 1986**
Vol. I. Ulan-Ude: Bur. kn. izd.

Khandagurova M.V. 2008

Obryadnost kudinskikh i verkholskikh buryat vo vtoroi polovine XX veka (basseiny verkhnego i srednego techeniya rek: Kuda, Murino i Kamenka). Irkutsk: Amtera.

Khangalov M.N. 1958–1960

Sobraniye sochineniy. In 3 vols. Ulan-Ude: Buryat. kn. izd.

Krishna N. 2010

Sacred Animals of India. New Delhi: Penguin Books India.

Mify narodov mira. 1980

S.A. Tokarev (ed.). Moscow: Sov. entsikl.

Miller G.F. 2009

Opisaniye sibirskikh narodov. Moscow: Pamyatniki istorich. mysli.

Mitroshkina A.G. 1987

Buryatskaya antroponimiya. Novosibirsk: Nauka.

Natsov G.D. 1995

Materialy po istorii i kulture buryat, pt. 1. Ulan-Ude: Izd. BNC SO RAN.

Osokin G.M. 1906

Na granitse Mongolii: Ocherki i materialy k etnografii Yugo-Zapadnogo Zabaikaliya. St. Petersburg: [Tip. A.S. Suvorina].

Potanin G.N. 1881

Ocherki Severo-Zapadnoi Mongolii. Rezultaty puteshestviya, ispolnennogo v 1876–1877 gg. po porucheniyu Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva. Iss. I: Dnevnik puteshestviya. Materialy dlya fizicheskoi geografii i topografii Severo-Zapadnoi Mongolii. St. Petersburg.

Potanin G.N. 1883

Ocherki Severo-Zapadnoi Mongolii. Rezultaty puteshestviya, ispolnennogo v 1876–1877 gg. po porucheniyu Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva. Iss. IV: Materialy etnograficheskii. St. Petersburg.

Sharakhshinova N.O. 2000

Uligery buryat. Ulan-Ude: Izd. BNC SO RAN.

Smolev Y.S. 1900

Tri tabangutskikh roda selenginskikh buryat: Etnograficheskiy ocherk. Moscow: [Tov. tip. A.I. Mamontova].

Tsybiktarov A.D. 1999

Buryatiya v drevnosti. Istoriya s drevneishikh vremen do XVII veka, iss. 3. Ulan-Ude: Izd. Bur. Gos. Univ.

Received April 6, 2020.