

doi:10.17746/1563-0110.2021.49.2.118-124

L.S. Dampilova

*Institute for Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan Studies,
Buryat Scientific Center,
Siberian Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences,
Sakhyanovoy 6, Ulan-Ude, 670047, Russia
E-mail: dampilova_luda@rambler.ru*

Mythologizing History in Buryat Shamanic Rites

This study explores the regional specificity of Buryat rites with regard to the variable manifestation of mythological and historical components, and late innovations. The first attempt is made to reconstruct the mythological component of spoken texts accompanying these rites in the historical and ethno-cultural context. On the basis of field and archival data, contamination and transformation of myth and history in ritual is demonstrated. The principal characters such as deities, shamans, tribal and clan chiefs are described, and the semantics and pragmatics of ancestor and master-spirits in the historical context are discussed. The mythological status of supernatural characters of the rite is assessed. Specific ethnic criteria of turning real personalities into mythological characters in the historic context are listed. Universal features traceable in the process of turning history into myth include a regular mixture of mythological motifs with historical facts, interchange of temporal planes, and especially the reincarnation theme. The conclusion is made that pragmatic rites are the most stable, whereas the general tendency is that rites become less and less connected with mythology and progressively less hyperbolic.

Keywords: Rite, history, myth, tradition, semantics, semiotics.

Introduction

A diachronic cross-section of ritual evidence from one region and synchronic cross-section of evidence from different regions in a comparative context is widely used for identifying social-demographic aspects, worldview, and historical facts in modern Russian ethnology and folklore studies. Interdisciplinary research from a broad historical and ethnic-cultural perspective is also actively pursued. Comparative and typological studies have come to the fore in international scholarship for studying traditional values and mental features of a particular ethnic group. Folklore-ethnographic and historical approaches supplement the study of the processes of objectification of scholarly integration. In this article, the comparative method is based on the findings of structural-semiotic

analysis. As S. Langer observed, language, myth, and rite are the semiotic means of culture, and “the material of myth is the already familiar symbolism of dreams and reveries” (2000: 159–160).

This study intends to identify historical, ethnologic, and mythological components in shamanic ritual activities using the accompanying verbal evidence. Comparing the variants of rites and texts implies interpretation of protagonists’ images and their transformation in the course of historical and religious changes in the worldview. The theoretical conclusions of scholars concerning the functioning of symbols, myths, and ritual ceremonies are taken into account while studying local ethnic rites. The opinion of the famous English ethnographer, anthropologist, and folklorist V. Turner is particularly relevant for our research: “Performers of different age,

sex, ritual role, status, degree of esoteric knowledge, etc. provide information of varying completeness, explanatory power, and internal consistency. From this information, the researcher must deduce a conclusion as to what the members of the given society think about the rite” (1983: 41). We also agree with K. Klakkhon, according to whom, “strict definition of ‘myth’ as ‘sacred history’ does not yet give grounds to assume that myths only serve as descriptions of rites that are correlated with them. Rose rightly asserts that ‘there are many myths whose connection with the rite needs to be proven, and not simply assumed’” (2003: 159). Therefore, in the course of comparative analysis, texts will be considered in conjunction with ritual ceremonies.

The content of shamanic texts mainly depends on the extra-textual mythological structure, where the myth is present as obligatory background. It accompanies the ritual action and reveals the content and structure of the rite being performed. In this study, the myth is viewed as a “ritualized text” (D.D. Fraser). We follow the point made by Russian and international anthropologists, ethnologists, and folklorists who stated that religion has inherited the functions of the archaic continuum of myth and rite. This work follows comparative-contrastive, semantic-hermeneutic, and structural-semiotic methods.

Mythologization of protagonists in ritual action

Ancestral spirits. For the first time, specific shamanic practices of the western Buryats are analyzed using the evidence of contemporary field research compared with archival sources of the earlier period. The genealogy of shamans and continuous connection with celestial ancestors play one of the most important roles in ritual activities in the Buryat and Mongolian traditions. Establishing a connection between the worlds is a prerequisite for any rite. According to the informants, spirits as ephemeral creatures, most often the souls of deceased ancestors, but precisely those who were close to the old men or shamans conducting the rite, act as a connecting link. As it turns out from numerous stories of the Buryats, the soul of a shaman in the sky watches over his descendants and helps them during the rite. The ancestral spirits belong to local deities and establish a connection between the world of the living and the highest celestial dwellers who do not contact people. Each Buryat tribe has its own totemic first ancestor; different clans in the tribe may also have their own first ancestors. In modern practice during the rite, people address the spirits of recently deceased ancestors who are closely linked with historical reality.

Precisely the ritual action, during which a connection with the other world is established, introduces all events

of the rite into mythological time and space. “In the mythopoetic chronotope, time condenses and becomes a form of space... Space, on the other hand, becomes ‘charged’ by the internally-intensive properties of time (‘temporalization’ of space), is drawn into its movement, becomes inherently rooted in the myth and plot (that is, in the text), unfolding in time” (Toporov, 1983: 232). In this regard, a mythological chronotope with specific rules of behavior is introduced during the ritual action.

Each locality has its own revered spirits whose names are mentioned in all rites of local importance. They can be both great shamans and leaders of clans and tribes. The mythological history of clan spirits is closely related to real personalities and their biographies. As T.D. Skrynnikova observed: “A general tribal and ethnic cult of the ancestors of chiefs and princes, whose persons were deified by many peoples during their lifetime, emerges in the process of posthumous deification of the heads of clans and tribes” (1997: 182). In the legends and stories about shamans, the biography of the protagonist is told with mythological additions about his supernatural abilities during his lifetime and after his death. It is notable that as with shamans, historical figures acquire magical properties when they become the protagonists of legends and stories.

While performing any shamanic rite, each Buryat clan first of all mentions its ancestor by whose name the clan is often called and who is considered its protector and guardian. According to the records of the ethnologist S.P. Baldaev, numerous representatives of the Gotol clan in Bokhansky District of the Irkutsk Region began the ceremony by invoking their ancestor, calling him “the venerable father Gotol” (1970: 18). The contemporary descendants of Gotol in the village of Krasnaya Buret address *goyokhon Gotol tædei* – ‘the beautiful grandmother Gotol’ (informant Mikhail Ubugunov, born 1928, clans of Bulagat and Gotol, village of Krasnaya Buret, Bokhansky District, Irkutsk Region. FMA* 2011). According to the informants, her spirit comes to help them; she has the ability to keep the connection between the worlds. How could such a substitution occur and was there really such a woman? The image of the mythological old woman is clarified by the records of Baldaev on the history of the Gotol clan: “Gotol was the illegitimate son of Alagui from Amarkhan, who came from the Abzai clan of the Ekhirite tribe, at the time living in the valley of the Lena (Zulkhe) River. She was smart, agile, and hard-working. Gotol was narrow-minded, clumsy, and weak...” (1970: 66). As is known, special events become engrained in the mass consciousness and acquire mythological features over time. It seems

*Field materials of the author.

that a strong, real-life female protagonist with a special charisma was the basis for the legends about the clan ancestor. In the mythological version, there happened a substitution of names (the mother received the name of her less interesting son).

A protagonist endowed with mythical, supernatural properties is summoned as a protector of the clan in specific ritual action when the spirits of ancestors are invoked. In shamanic legends, real historical events are interspersed with fictional inserts about the supernatural deeds of a shaman. If a shaman had high authority and possessed esoteric knowledge during his lifetime, his abilities after death would acquire incredible epic scope in the stories about him. The stories about the activities of shamans' spirits were distinguished by specific features, distinctive for each of them, which were correlated both with the real biography of the protagonist and mythological prehistory of the entire clan.

Reincarnation into a bird. Functions of the protagonists in ritual action are completely subordinate to mythological and symbolic components of the rite. In this situation, real social-historical and spatial-temporal landmarks naturally shift. Notably, “myth and rite are symbolic procedures, and they are intertwined with each other, along with other things, much more closely in this respect. Myth is a system of verbal symbols, while rite is a system of symbolic objects and actions” (Klakkhon, 2003: 168).

A combination of real and mythological stories is typical of the modern traditions and legends about the revered ancestors. “The shaman Semyon would turn into a goose; he had such abilities that he could stir boiling salamat with his bare hands and could lift a table of food with his teeth. Grandma Romashka would turn into a dove and visit us. She could simultaneously bind sheaves and bake bread at home” (informant Mikhail Ubugunov. FMA 2011). In the first episode, the traditional motif of shaman stories, associated with the gift of shamans from the blacksmith clans to hold red-hot iron with their bare hands, is supplemented with elements showing a clear combination of the real and fictional. The unreal, confirmed by the authority of the shaman, becomes reality. We should mention that organization of artistic space and time plays a special role in constructing the mythological discourse. Images of heroes in the popular consciousness gradually become magnified and acquire mythological features with the help of the traditional motif of reincarnation and coincidence of times. Ritual texts manifest a steady mixture and interaction of myths and stories of a different temporal continuum. Later legends about the ancestors contain real names and events, but they show a connection with the early myth of the first ancestors. A mythological motif about the origin of a certain tribe or clan from some animal, bird, or reptile is widespread in shamanic legends and traditions.

A distinctive mythological motif of reincarnation into a bird is present in the above text about the Tarasa shamans. The spirits of the shamans from this area are referred to as the Tarasa elders, who in the invocations are designated by encoded names: *akhanuts* – ‘the elders’, *tarasain eheshyyl* – ‘the Tarasa greats’, *ynderei ybged* – ‘elders of the heights’. Baldaev, who collected extensive evidence on the system of shamanic genealogies of the western Buryats, came to the conclusion that “the cult of the Akhanuts has transformed over time into the cult of ancestors. In the ancient times, three main clans of the Akhanuts—the Ardai Akhanuts... Obusa Akhanuts... and Tarasa Akhanuts... emerged” (1940: No. 1091, pp. 3–4). It was believed that the Tarasa great shamans could reincarnate during their lifetime and travel to other worlds, and after death could return in the form of a bird. According to the records of the ethnographer M.N. Khangalov, made in the late 19th century, “...the Tarasa Akhanuts turn into wolves, eagles, geese, and camels. They cannot be transformed into other animals, from which they do not originate” (1959: 180). We are especially interested in the image of the goose.

Contemporary stories of informants mention a white bird with a special immanent power. In the tradition of the Mongolian peoples, birds of white color are most closely associated with the celestial world. It is interesting that according to the study of V. Turner, among the African tribes this color personifies harmony and purity of the ancestors: “Ancestors are considered to be even purer, and albinos enjoy special respect, since they are regarded as ‘carriers of whiteness of the ancestor-spirits’” (1983: 36).

Transformation of the original mythologeme. Comparative analysis of our own data and archival materials reveals the preservation of the original code of the bird in the motif of reincarnation, but transformation of the mythologeme. According to the records of Baldaev from the 1960s, the formula about the geese is consistently repeated in the shamanic “poems” about the Tarasa spirits. The invocation of Egor, the son of Fedot, the last shaman from the great Tarasa clan emphasizes the differences of clans, and mentions reincarnation into a goose and eagle: *Alandara tolgoiydon / Arban galuun bolozho, / Ganganhan udkhamnai, / Budeneee tolgoiydon / Burged shubuun bolozho, / Elihen udkhamnai!* (Baldaev, 1912: 3) – ‘On the summit of Alandar / Turning into ten geese, / Our honking clan, / On the summit of Budenei / Turning into a bird-eagle, / Our soaring clan!’

The image of a bird as a messenger of the upper world and symbol of the ancestor's soul is typical of the entire Turkic-Mongolian mythology. Ancestors communicate with the earthly world through a bird. Owing to the loss of the original data, the image of the goose transformed into a white bird, swan, or dove is the most popular of all reincarnations according to the

modern interpretation. In this case, the mythological version of the origin of the Tarasa shamans is preserved in the context of real stories, mythologizing the entire narrative. Thus, we can observe contamination of the images of the chosen real ancestor and totemic first ancestor, summoned during the rite.

The studies in historical poetics conducted by N.A. Krinichnaya concerning the problem of reconstructing motifs in folklore texts are extremely important for our work. “The transformation of motifs from archaic forms to later forms occurs primarily in the direction of their demythologization, dehyperbolization, and filling with various kinds of realities, which ultimately results in displacement of the mythological and epic-related content by specific historical content” (Krinichnaya, 1987: 24). Thus, we can observe oblivion and generalization of more ancient versions of the myth and a dominant role of modern realities associated with historical changes in the life of the Buryats, including household innovations adopted from the Russians, such as binding sheaves or baking bread.

Combining history and myth

A historical fact sometimes becomes the basis of a myth in shamanic verbal evidence. The serpent as a progenitor is quite common in the mythology of various peoples of the world. The myth of the first totemic ancestor most frequently appears as a fact without explanation; in rare cases, the reason for the appearance of a particular totem is mentioned. According to stable formulaic expressions in the poetic texts of summoning the ancestors, the Buryats from the Khordut clan derive their totem from snakes. Shamanic legends recorded by Khangalov describe the myth about the ancestors of that clan in a more sophisticated way: “The Ongo-Khorduts turn into a bear, and snakes go out of their mouths, nose, ears, and fingers” (1959: 180). In real stories, they appear as snake hunters, but over time, the object of their hunt turned into the totem of the clan, while the image of the snake is preserved in different variations, including sophisticated mythological contaminations of zoomorphic totems.

The metamorphosis of the snake, which played an important role in the shamanic tradition, becomes mythologized: *Narin mogoi ilbimnai / Namtar bakha unaamnai* – ‘The thin snake is our magic, / The short frog is my horse’ (Ksenofontov, Batorov, 1975). Real history is forgotten in the formulaic expression of the clan-related difference, and connection with the advanced mythological semantics of the snake image is consistently preserved. In this case, the myth about the totemic first ancestor becomes combined with historical fact.

Mythologization of historical figures

In shamanic practice, if the spirit of an ancestor is identified as being a famous, historical person, this implies the image of a mythological warrior, protector, and hero with supernatural qualities. A vivid example of contamination of real events and mythological components of the rite are the revered spirits of the Ekhirite Buryat tribe, called the “black riders” (Azharai Bukhe and Kharamsai Mergen). The archival materials of Baldaev have preserved numerous versions of both real and mythological biographies of the main characters. Notably, the mythological versions seem natural in folklore narratives, while versions of the real life stories raise doubts as to their reliability. Analysis of the available folklore and ethnographic evidence proves that Azharai Bukhe and Kharamsai Mergen were real leaders of the Ekhirite clans, who participated in historical events (internal wars with the Mongols, resistance to the Cossacks) in the 1840s–1870s. After their tragic death, they were both included into the circle of formidable shamanic deities (although they were not shamans) and turned into revered mythological spirits. The Buryats from the Ekhirite clans worshiped them as clan ancestors during the shaman initiation ceremony and as warriors and protectors during the rites on the occasion of all events associated with military operations. These spirits were revered as masters of the Lena River (the historical dwelling place of the Ekhirites), mythologizing their wealth and power. There is also a legend about the “black riders” as formidable guards, keeping the entrance to the kingdom of the dead of Erlen-Khan. Accumulation of new mythological stories was accompanied by “code-switching” of the same characters in different ritual events. It is as if the rite dictates new myths, and here it is appropriate to cite the opinion of E. Cassirer: “A myth is not a system of dogmatic beliefs: it consists not only of images and beliefs, but to a much greater extent of actions. <...> Rite is primary in relation to dogma both in a historical and psychological sense” (1998: 532).

Modern field research in the Kachugsky District of the Irkutsk Region, where the Ekhirite clans historically lived and where the cult of the “black riders” was the most elaborate, show that rites dedicated to formidable spirits are only performed by shamans when it is absolutely necessary. The shaman initiation rite (conducted by the Zaarin shaman Boris Bazarov, born 1946, of the blacksmith Galzut clan of the Ekhirite tribe, Ulan-Ude. FMA 2009), which was recorded by the author of this article, is of particular interest. A prerequisite for the rite was preparation of special trees and fires for communicating with the ancestors. The Buryats from the Ekhirite tribe dedicate four personalized bonfires to the deities; the largest bonfire is intended for a sacrificial

ram. Each element of the rite has hidden information. It is pertinent for our discussion that the sacrificial ram is covered with black silk, which is dedicated to the “black riders” as the clan, ancestral celestial dwellers of the Ekhirites. For understanding the meaning of the rite, it is necessary to decipher its semiotic aspect preserved in the “collective memory”.

Thus, we can conclude that the image of the “black riders” with their polysemantic function emerged at the junction of two worlds—the real world (during their lifetime) and mythological world (after death). In this case, myths canonize the protagonists pushing aside the history of real persons, which is often present only in the background. In some cases, an entirely new myth is composed, preserving the principal image of a formidable spirit.

Myth and history in rites dedicated to the sacred space

This section discusses the rites associated with specific topographic realities. The sacred space outlines the domain of the local master-spirit to whom seasonal rites are dedicated. Sacred places require a special attitude towards them and adherence to specific rules. Most often, the “master” of a cultic place is a real historical person, usually the first of those who settled in that area, and after death he becomes a revered spirit. In the Mongolian world, mainly outstanding male or female shamans are endowed with sacred status. Modern field evidence confirms that periodic and occasional rites of today are carried out systematically; legends and traditions of the master-spirit are actively used and modified. Rites associated with the cult of the mountains seem to be pertinent to our research.

The mythological masters of the mountains with no real prototypes stand out in the sacred space. They may belong to the most archaic rites of worship; only a strong clan with ancient shamanic history may have higher deities as patrons. In such a rite, gender-related, occasional, temporal, spatial, and color codes are observed in strict accordance with the rules of the action.

Each individual clan in each settlement has its own revered mountain or summit. For example, the Shosholok clan in the Zakamensky District of Buryatia worships Mount Uran Dushe (‘Skillful Anvil’). According to the legend, ninety nine or thirty three celestial blacksmiths descend on it and engage in blacksmithing, since the Shosholok clan worships these deities. In the celestial pantheon, they stand out as the most powerful patrons associated with iron and fire. “Fifty five western tengerins led by Khan Khurmast Tengeri, forty four eastern tengerins led by Atai Ulan Tengeri, thirteen northern khats led by Bukha Noyon, seventy seven celestial blacksmiths led by Damdin Dorlig Sakhyusan, the keeper

of faith and protector of warriors and warfare Khisan Ulan Tengeri, and the spirits and masters of localities were summoned for the rite on Mount Uran Dushe. Each shaman-blacksmith participating in the rite summoned his ancestral blacksmith spirits—Ongon Tengeri” (informant Semyon Tsyrenov, born 1938, Shosholok clan, shepherd, village of Sanaga, Zakamensky District. FMA 2012). As can be seen from this example, not only the celestial dwellers of the highest rank from the shamanic pantheon are summoned. The lamaized character Damdin Dorlig Sakhyusan is the leader of the blacksmith deities. In modern rites, depending on religious preferences, both shamanic characters and characters with modified names can be addressed at the same time.

Field research on ethnic Buryatia have revealed the largest number of mountain masters associated with the names of shamans who lived in the area and were endowed with mythological functions in the status of spirits. For example, people in the Barguzin Valley revere Shinalzhan, the summit of the Ikat Ridge. The Buryats from the Khonkho Sengelder clan worship a female deity there—their patron spirit who, according to their beliefs, lives in a cave and when necessary comes out and communicates with the descendants. The origin of the spirit is similar to numerous biographies from shamanic legends: a girl fell ill with the shamanic disease; her father refused to initiate her as a shaman, beat her, and locked her up with the sheep; from hunger she drank the blood of a ram; she suffered for twenty days; when her mother brought food, the girl broke free, ran away, and hanged herself in the foothills of Shinagalzhan. The Buryats from the Khonkho Sengelder clan perform an annual ritual sacrifice of a sheep to her as the daughter of Isgei named Zagalan (*Isgein basagan Zagalan gezhe neretei*). It is believed that an angry, innocently offended spirit must be propitiated. And if the spirit is not angry, then, as a female with maternal protective functions, she protects and helps her descendants. The invocation includes a text in a standard form of offering and a request with the following appeal:

*Narin Burgal selgeetei,
Namtar Daakhin guideltei,
Doloon narhan sergetei,
Dongoin Maryaan huudaltai
Iisgiin basagan Zagalan.*

With the narrow (river) Burgal in coolness,
With the place of being in the low-lying Dakhin,
With seven pines – hitching posts,
With the place of stay in Dongoin Maryaan
The daughter of Isgi Zagalan.

(Shamanizm..., 2003).

As is customary in the tradition of shamanic rites, ancient places of worship by the inhabitants of the

Barguzin Valley—*Daakhin*, *Doloon narhan*, *Dongoin Maryaan*—are mentioned here. The Evenks of the entire valley celebrate their summer *boldir* festival every year in a scenic area surrounded by mountains. During the festival, they performed a circular dance around a fire singing *yahii*, and therefore this whole depression is called Yassy (Buryat *Yahii*). Notably, the Evenks marked their places of worship by the name of the trees: *Doloon narhan* – ‘seven pines’, *Khuhan barisa* – ‘birch place of offerings’, *Shenehen barisa* – ‘larch place of offerings’ (informant Mikhail Sandanov, born 1958, Khonkho Sengelder clan, village of Urzhil, Barguzinsky District, FMA 2009).

The rites dedicated to mountains are accompanied by mythological stories that enhance the sacred function of mountains and their masters as guides between the worlds. Mount Dongoin Maryaan is famous for a deep hole into the underground, located on its bald summit. The Buryats call this place *Gazaray urkhe* (lit. ‘chimney of the earth’), that is, the junction of the two worlds, a narrow abyss for transiting to the underworld. The legend of a mighty hunter supplements the mythological picture associated with the specific features of the mountainous terrain: when following a dwarf, he found himself in the underworld and saw little people there serving Erlen Khan (informant Shagdur Badmaev, born 1924, Buga Shono clan, artist, village of Bayangol, Barguzinsky District, FMA 2009).

For comparison, we should turn to the legends of the Zakamensky Buryats about the other world of Yagshad, where shamans and people with a special gift can enter. There was a great shaman Yampil podroda mooskha from the Shosholok clan. Once he disappeared for a month and returned bringing the fur of animals of five species with him. His whole subclan became rich; people said that their shaman visited the promised land and returned blessed. There are legends according to which the blessed country of Yagshad is located exactly between five magnificent mountains surrounding the village (informant Klavdia Budazhapova, born 1957, Sabar Khongoodor clan, history teacher, village of Sanaga, Zakamensky District, FMA 2012). It is believed that one can get to the other world from the mountainous area as the promised land and prototype of the divine land of Divazhan. After the death of shamans, additional mythological stories, which affect the course of ritual actions, appear along with realistic stories about their lives. Depending on specific mythological stories, the rites are performed either by old people or by shamans. Ritual actions dedicated to master-spirits fulfill a pragmatic function.

We have also recorded the rites in which shamanic places of worship with changes in religious traditions received a Buddhist status of sacred objects. The revered spirit-masters of the area acquire corresponding names, and rites are carried out according to the canons of

Buddhism, although, as it turned out in the course of the conversation, the rites secretly preserved their shamanic roots. Therefore, in some cases, ritual acts are performed according to both shamanic and Buddhist rules.

Instances of sacralization of mountains associated with changes in historical realities have been identified in the course of field research. Joint life with the Russians and their role in the life of the indigenous population has led to emergence of a cult of new master-spirits in accordance with the necessities of the time. In the same Zakamensky District, a Russian Cossack is considered to be the master of Mount Baatar-khan. Ritual worship is dedicated to that master-spirit before going to serve in the army; during war, special rites of his worship as master-warrior and protector of warriors were performed. According to the notes taken by G.-D. Natsov in the early 20th century, “Bagatur Khan was offered a *toolei* (head) of a cow, and a fish was placed on top. The legend says that this deity had the appearance of a man with a black face wearing Russian clothes” (1995: 73). The black face means a bearded Cossack, who guarded the border in this area. Notably, the Russian warrior is mythologized according to the shamanic tradition. Pragmatism begins to be involved here: precisely such a master-spirit is needed for performing the transitional rite associated with departing for the army. It is worth mentioning that in this case there is no detailed mythological history of the patron and no definite, real protagonist, but only a generalized image.

Modern records emphasize the persistence of a basic code that determines the status of the master-spirit. A standard, ritual set of food is enriched by fish: “Along with traditional Buryat dishes such as *salamat*, milk skin, *khuruut*, milk, and vodka, such local fish as Asiatic trout is definitely served, based on the belief that fried fish is the best food for Russians” (informant Klavdia Budazhapova, FMA 2012). Notably, the meaning of each gift that is offered to a certain spirit and acquires an “ethno-semiotic status” (Baiburin, 2005: 31), correlates with a supposed real protagonist.

The rites dedicated to the sacred space manifest a restructuring of the traditional system of revered protagonists, associated with religious and historical changes in the worldview, although the overall pattern of the ritual action remains unchanged. Ancient rites involved a monumental picture when thirty three mighty warriors made a forge out of thirty three mountain peaks and conducted blacksmith rites. The main protagonist in the later rites is an ordinary Russian Cossack with real facial features, and he is worshiped as a military man. Thus, we come to the conclusion that clear demythologization and dehyperbolization occurs in modern ritual activities. Spirit-masters of local mountains as religious and mythological characters with protective power turn out to be closely related to historical figures.

Conclusions

On the basis of the results of numerous expeditions and archival evidence, we have come to the conclusion that the composition of ritual actions is influenced both by the mythological component and historical events. The historical context sets a measure of reality and authenticity to the protagonist, while the paradigm of sacred beliefs behind it determines the mythological component. The analysis of the composition of ritual actions has shown that the ritual pattern remains unaltered even when the summoned mythological protagonists change. Indeed, “striving for uniformity and continuity of the models developed by culture has found expression in the entire complex of means that ensure the maximum stability of these models” (Baiburin, 2005: 12).

This research has made it possible to establish a model for mythologizing historical facts in the most stable elements of the rite. The mythological status of protagonists of ritual actions is primarily determined by the motif of reincarnation into the spirit of the ancestor, master-spirit of the area, while their role and function are determined by historical and mythological events. Comparison of modern field evidence with earlier records reveals both actualization of the archaic semantics of some stable motifs, and replacement of an autochthonous mythological tradition with new mythologized versions associated with the flow of historical information. Instances when the mythological content was replaced by specific historical content and vice versa have been described in this study.

Acknowledgment

This study was a part of the Public Contract, Project “Ethnic and Cultural Identity in the Architectonics of the Folklore and Literary Texts of the Peoples Living in the Baikal Region”.

References

Baiburin A.K. 2005

Zhilishche v obryadakh i predstavleniyakh vostochnykh slavyan. 2nd rev. ed. Moscow: Yazyki slavyan. kultury.

Baldaev S.P. 1912

Prizyvaniye Yegora, syna Fedota (Pidoodoi Yegoroi durdalga): Zapisano ot Tosona Petukhova, Bokhanskiy rayon, 1912 g. CVRK IMBT SO RAN. F. 36, Inv. 1, D. 1268.

Baldaev S.P. 1940

Zayany: Zapisano ot P. Petrova, s. Khadakhan, Alarskiy raion, 1940 g. CVRK IMBT SO RAN. F. 36, Inv. 1, D. 11/53.

Baldaev S.P. 1970

Rodoslovniye predaniya i legendy buryat, pt. I. Ulan-Ude: Buryat. kn. izd.

Cassirer E. 1998

Izbrannoye: Opyt o cheloveke. Moscow: Gardarika.

Khangelov M.N. 1959

Sobraniye sochineniy, vol. 2. In 3 vols. Ulan-Ude: Buryat. kn. izd.

Klakkhon K. 2003

Mify i obryady: Obshchaya teoriya. In *Obryadovaya teoriya mifa*. St. Petersburg: Izd. Sankt-Peterburg. Gos. Univ., pp. 157–176.

Krinichnaya N.A. 1987

Russkaya narodnaya istoricheskaya proza: Voprosy genezisa i struktury. Leningrad: Nauka.

Ksenofontov G.V., Batorov P.P. 1975

Po shamanskim verovaniyam buryat. 1975 g. Yakutskiy filial SO RAN. F. 4, Inv. 1, Item 52a, fol. 105–108.

Langer S. 2000

Filosofiya v novom klyuche. Moscow: Respublika.

Natsov G.-D. 1995

Materialy po istorii i kulture buryat, pt. I, G.R. Galdanova (trans. and notes). Ulan-Ude: Izd. BNC SO RAN.

Shamanizm barguzinskih i kudarinskih buryat na sovremennom etape. Avgust 2003 g. 2003

CVRK IMBT SO RAN. Obshchiy fond, shamanstvo. No. 2647.

Skrynnikova T.D. 1997

Kharizma i vlast v epokhu Chingis-khana. Moscow: Vost. lit.

Toporov V.N. 1983

Prostranstvo i tekst. In *Tekst: Semantika i struktura*. Moscow: Nauka, pp. 227–284.

Turner V. 1983

Simvol i ritual. Moscow: Nauka.

Received December 18, 2019.

Received in revised form January 28, 2020.