

## **Celestial Bodies on the Ob Ugrian Ritual Artifacts (Based on Archaeological and Ethnographic Sources of the 2nd Millennium AD)**

*This study explores the religious role of celestial bodies depicted on Ob Ugrian ritual artifacts from several Russian museums, with reference to ethnographic, folkloric, and artistic sources. While neither the sun nor the moon play a major role in the Ugrian religion, they are personified and feature in legends and myths. Khanty and Mansi rites refer to lunar phases (new moon) and the position of the sun. Solar signs are present mostly on ritual artifacts relating to the Celestial Horseman cult, possibly derived from early cosmogonic ideas. In Western Siberia, the symbols of the sun and the moon appear no earlier than AD 800. In the 10th–12th centuries, such artifacts were cast in the eastern Urals. The 13th to 14th century silver plaques from Western Siberia showing a falconer testify to the Vogul (Mansi) migration from the Western Urals to their current place of residence. The scene featuring a falconer surrounded by animals, the sun, and the moon is still represented on cloth paraphernalia of Mir-Susne-Khum, the Ob Ugrian cultural hero. Solar signs have been used by the Mansi and Khanty to decorate the sacrificial offerings to the goddess Kaltas, the gables of ritual barns, and burial structures. Also, they were used for signatures on documents.*

**Keywords:** *Sun, moon, solar signs, Mansi, Khanty, ritual art.*

### **Introduction**

Celestial bodies—the sun and the moon—were rarely the objects of scholarly research of the mythology and sacral fine art of the Ob Ugrian peoples. A. Kannisto believed that the sun played a relatively insignificant role in the beliefs of the Voguls (Kannisto, Liimola, 1958: 86). K.F. Karjalainen agreed with this and argued that the sun did not have any religious significance, was not the object of religious ceremonies (except for a few rituals of the Ostyaks in the basin of the Vasyugan River), nor was there reliable information concerning the worship of the moon. He explained this by the fact that the Ob Ugrians did not reach the agricultural stage: in his opinion, only farmers might understand the importance of the sun for the livelihood (Karjalainen, 1996: 44–47).

At the turn of the 19th–20th centuries, the Ostyaks personified the celestial bodies as the Sun Old Woman and the Night Old Man/Crescent Moon Old Man (Ibid.: 45, 47). On the Severnaya Sosva River, the Voguls perceived the sun as a woman: it is day when she walks about, and it is night when she stays at home (Kannisto, Liimola, 1958: 86). In the Vogul fairy tales, the Sun Woman (*Khotal-ekva*) and the Crescent Moon (*Etpos-oika* – ‘Night light old man’), on the one hand, acted as sister and brother, and, on the other hand, as husband and wife (Chernetsov, 1935: 15). During the home rituals, the Northern Mansi would put a shot glass of vodka, which was intended for *Khotal-ekva*, on the window sill; they would simultaneously ignite the chaga mushroom so the smoke would be seen by the goddess. The Kazym Khanty believed that the sun was a woman with two daughters;

in the winter time the daughters stayed to watch over the people; the sun and the moon were considered husband and wife (Pyatnikova, 2008: 12, 17).

The literature does not describe the cases of making representations of deities in the form of the sun or the moon. In our field experience, we have found only one exception: in 2004, in the village of Yamgort (Shuryshkarsky District of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (YNAO)), in one of the bags with ritual paraphernalia kept in the barn of the Khanty E.K. Pyresev, we observed sacrificial scarves and three figures of home patrons: the Sun, Earth, and Water, made of many robes and head scarves put on each other.

The legends, “The daughters of the sun and the moon”, “The origin of the crescent moon”, “About the people of the sun and of the moon” (Mify..., 1990: 65–66) were recorded among the eastern Khanty; the legend, “How they fetched the sun and the crescent moon...” (Ibid.: 293–294) was recorded in Vezhakary on the Ob River, as well as the legend, “How the moon came to earth” from among the Lyapin Mansi (Ibid.: 109). The following names of the Mansi fairy tale heroes are known: *Etpos-agi*—daughter of the crescent moon, *Khotal-ekva*—the Sun Woman, *Khotal-agi*—daughter of the sun; the crescent moon was considered masculine, while the sun was feminine (Balandin, 1939: 31). According to one informant, “Old people say: the sun sits in a sled, and a horse drags the sled. The sun is a woman, and the crescent moon is her son, a young lad, *Etpos-pyg*. He grows and comes to an end. Then he grows again. He goes hunting and hits an elk with a stick, and something happens to his eyes; he ends up striking his eye, then gets sick and comes to an end. His mother tells him, ‘You hit your eye all the time, you would be better off as the moon, you would grow again’”; “You cannot look at the sun with two eyes—one eye looks, and the second eye squints. The sun looked down and said, ‘The Mansi are bad people, totally ugly’. And the crescent moon answers her, ‘You yourself shine this way, but I shine quietly; people look at me, and I see—good people’” (Gemuev, Baulo, 1999: 121).

Cosmogonist beliefs of the Voguls were more frequently expressed in the form of signs associating the sunset with good weather; weather forecasts were also made from the moon; an eclipse of the sun announced a change of the tsar (Kannisto, Liimola, 1958: 86). Kannisto recorded a spell that was used to call out the sun: on a cloudy day, a Vogul would comb the air with each of his hands in the direction of the sun and say, “Old Woman Sun, comb, comb! Why did you go up in your father’s dirty pants? You have no shame in the whole village, in the whole town”. The spell could only be successfully executed by a representative of the *mos* phratry; if a man from the *por* phratry attempted to do this, the weather might only get worse (Ibid.).

All rituals of the Ob Ugrians were tied to the waxing moon; during the waning of the moon, the rituals were

not conducted. In ritual actions, any forward movement or turns around were made exclusively in the direction of the sun (clockwise). The ritual of feeding the moon among the Kazym Khanty has been described in detail by T.R. Pyatnikova (2008: 20–22).

Ritual ceremonies and some types of economic activities were supposed to be completed before the sunset. Variants of the legend about the evil mythical character, the Twister of tendons, who punished women for housework in twisting tendon cords after sunset, are widely known; they have been recorded among the Sosva (Kannisto, Liimola, 1951: 204–206) and Lyapin (Balandin, 1939: 32; Istochniki..., 1987: 199–200; Soldatova, 2008: 114) Mansi, as well as among the Kazym (Lekhtisalo, 1998: 79–80), Berezovo (Lapina, 1998: 39; Baulo, 2002: 39), and Shuryshkary (FMA\*, 2001) Khanty.

### Representations of solar signs among the Ob Ugrian peoples

Representations of solar signs do not often appear on the ritual artifacts of the Ob Ugrians. Most such signs occur on objects related to the worship of *Mir-susne-khum* (*Mir-vannty-kho*, *Mir-lyarty-kho*, *Urt-iki*, *Otyr*): “The Man Who Watches (Drives around) the World”, the Warrior Old Man, the younger son of the supreme god *Numi-Torum*. The Mansi and the Khanty represent him in the form of a Celestial Horseman who travels around the sinful world and protects people day and night. *Mir-susne-khum*, the Sun and the Moon (the Crescent Moon) are the characters that often intersect in myths and legends. In the legend of “How the sun and the moon were obtained, and how birds and beasts appeared on the earth”, “the warrior who has the appearance of a yellow wagtail” (one of the names of *Mir-susne-khum*) obtained the sun and the moon from the underground kingdom of *Khul-Otyr*, threw them upward, “and they hung there” (Chernetsov, 1935: 29–31). According to other legends, *Mir-Susne-khum* was married to the daughter of the Moon Man, then to the daughter of the Sun Woman (Rombandeeva, 1993: 159), and to *Etpos-ai*, the daughter of the Moon (Gemuev, Baulo, 1999: 206).

In a number of myths, the epithets related to the solar luminary are used to describe *Mir-susne-khum*. According to B. Munkácsi, one of the names of this deity was “the Man who emits light” (cited after (Gemuev, 1990: 192)). In the invocatory songs of the late 19th century, *Mir-susne-khum* was addressed as follows, “As a golden braid of the rising sun / To the ring-shaped round earth / Reflect as a ray on the street!”; “...like the golden ray of the rising

\*Field materials of the author.

sun / Light up above!"; "...Put on an outfit like that of the rising sun!"; "...*Otyr* with the braids of the rising sun" (Geroicheskiy epos..., 2010: 65, 95). At the same period, it was believed on the Severnaya Sosva River that *Mir-susne-khum* was the son of *sōrñipos*—"the golden light" (Kannisto, Liimola, 1958: 111). When referring to the deity, people would say, "The golden solar hand (that is, the bundle of sunrays penetrating through the window)" (Ibid.: 114). The Mansi legend about the creation of the earth contains a description of the horse of *Mir-susne-khum*, "There stands a horse with the image of the moon, with the image of the sun..." (Mify..., 1990: 275).

V.N. Chernetsov considered the cult of *Mir-susne-khum* an echo of the cosmogonist views of the Ugrians. In his opinion, the Celestial Horseman was the personification of the sun, "Approaching the appearance of *Mir-susne-khum* from this perspective, in his cult we can understand the presence of silver dishes associated with the solar cult" (Chernetsov, 1947: 121). In this citation, Chernetsov meant the dishes that were used by the Ural hunters, including those used as representations of sacred disks, which illuminated the earth day and night (for a stronger impression, the ring-shaped bases of the dishes were removed), or as faces symbolizing the luminaries (Orbeli, Trever, 1935: XII). Chernetsov specified that in this information Orbeli relied on "one old source" of the 16th century, according to which two dishes turned to the worshipers with their back sides, would hang on a tree during a sacrifice among the Voguls. Their bases were removed and the dishes looked like convex metal disks representing the sun and the moon. With the arrival of the horse breeding Ugrians in the north, the role of the cosmogonist views in the beliefs of the Ob-Ural population increased, and metal disks, mirrors, and dishes representing the sun and the moon began to be used in cultic practices (Chernetsov, 1947: 123, 125). Gemuev agreed with this point of Chernetsov and argued that the notion of the essential closeness of *Mir-susne-khum* and the solar disk was clearly reflected in the attributes. He explained this not only by the demand for eastern silver in ancient times, but also by the demand for silver saucers, which were purchased from Russian merchants and given as a gift to *Mir-susne-khum* (Gemuev, 1990: 192).

Signs of the sun and the moon appear on the Nildino silver dish (8th–9th centuries, Central Asia; we should also mention a double—a silver dish found near the village of Bolshaya Anikovskaya in Cherdynsky Uyezd of the Perm Governorate (Orbeli, Trever, 1935: 20)), which would be hung on a leather cord during the rituals at the sanctuary of the Northern Mansi; the Mansi saw *Mir-susne-khum* in one of the riders depicted on the dish (Gemuev, Baulo, 1999: 107–118). According to N.V. Fedorova, the signs of the sun and the moon appeared in Western Siberian art in the 9th century under the possible influence of a subject where the deity was

shown with the sun and the moon in his hands. This scene is depicted on four Khwarezmian bowls of the 6th–7th and the first half of the 8th century (Darkevich, 1976a: 106, 107; Marschak, 1986: Abb. 86), found in the Perm Urals. Fedorova believed that while considering possible borrowings from distant cultures, one should take into account availability of objects with a certain scene to local artisans and the possibility of communication between artisans and the carriers of knowledge about the persons represented. The information that a certain character was an "important deity" and his attributes were also "divine" might have triggered the desire of local artisans to impart this "divinity" by means of similar signs to some new images, typical of local, Western Siberian, cultures (Brusnitsyna, Fedorova, 2016: 110).

A local artisan, already in Siberia, engraved the sun and the moon in the upper part of a well-known diskos with the representations of angels on the sides of the cross (Mesopotamia, 6th century), acquired in Berezovo before 1868 (Smirnov, 1909: Cat. 37). V.Y. Leshchenko believed that these drawings could have been made around the 7th to 8th centuries or later (1976: 179). According to Fedorova, the date of engraving was closer to the 9th century, and the images of solar signs were the earliest known among the population of the north of Western Siberia (Brusnitsyna, Fedorova, 2016: 110).

An anthropomorphic figurine of low-grade silver (?), which was found during unauthorized excavations in the Ob region, can be preliminarily attributed to the 10th–12th centuries. The images of the sun and the moon are located on the upper part of the chest, on the sides of the "sign of life" (Fig. 1). Although their meaning is unclear, it is important that solar signs were already present and carried a certain semantic message in the local Siberian casting in the early second millennium AD. One such example is the plaque of the 11th–12th centuries, which was a part of the family sacred objects of the Khanty in the Shuryshkarsky District of the YNAO; the plaque has a sophisticated scene with the representations of "solar" and "lunar" signs (Ibid.: 105). Similar signs were found on the objects of bronze casting found at medieval sanctuaries in the basin of the Severnaya Sosva (Baulo, 2011: Cat. 163–164).

A silver plaque (12.7 cm in diameter), which was a part of the family cultic attributes of the Synya Khanty, belongs to the 10th–12th centuries. Images of male and female figures, the horse, sun, moon, and beaver were engraved on its front side (Ibid.: Cat. 379). This may be an illustration of the Ob-Ugrian myth of the creation of the earth, which narrates about the travels of *Mir-susne-khum*. During his wandering, he successively married the daughters of a witch, water king, Southern woman, Crescent Moon Old Man, Old Woman Sun, etc. (Mify..., 1990: 258–290). Notably, *Sorni-pokh* (*Muv-verty-kho*), "the Golden Son" ("the Man who travels around



*Fig. 1.* Anthropomorphic figurine with representations of the sun and moon. Size 10.0 × 2.7 cm. Western Siberia, 10th–12th centuries.

the earth”), was the guardian spirit of the inhabitants of Ovolynkort village (Shuryshkarsky District of the YNAO), where the plaque was discovered.

According to Fedorova, the beginning of the second millennium AD in northwestern Siberia was marked by global changes in the life of society, which were also reflected in the so-called high-status art. New subjects appeared in this art: a rider with a hunting bird, and the images of the sun and the moon. They firmly entered the art of the local population and have been preserved until the present day. A series of round plaques depicting a rider surrounded by animals and birds (a falconer) is typical of the turn of the 13th–14th centuries in the Northern Urals and northwestern part of Western Siberia. The mandatory attribute of this image is the sun and the moon on the sides of the falconer’s head (Fedorova, 2014: 162). Most of these plaques were found in the Cis-Ural region, in the Cherdynsky Uyezd of the Perm Governorate (16 spec.); eight were found at the burial grounds in the basin of the Vym River, one on Vaygach Island, and nine in Western Siberia. Fedorova considered them as the products of the Bulgarian artisans who moved from the urban centers of the Volga Bulgaria to the Perm region and had close contacts with artisans and customers on both sides of the Northern Urals (*Ibid.*: 163–165, 169).

The number of known plaques “with the falconer” has increased in recent years owing to unauthorized excavations in Western Siberia. Three objects were found on the lower reaches of the Irtysh River; two objects are known from the Surgutsky District of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug–Yugra, and three from the burial ground in the basin of the Severnaya Sosva River (Berezovsky District of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug–Yugra) (Fig. 2).

Two silver plaques, preliminarily dated to the 13th–14th centuries, originate from the destroyed burial ground in the north of the Perm Territory (Cherdyn). The first plaque is a thin, convex, silver disk (7.2 cm in diameter) with a bronze loop riveted to it. The edge of the disk is decorated with two rows of “pearls”; a rider wearing a high helmet with a falcon on his right hand, and the signs of the sun and the moon are engraved on the front side (Fig. 3). The second plaque (10 cm in diameter) was forged from a bar of silver, and a bronze loop was riveted to it. A row of “pearls” and small “pyramids of pearls” were embossed on the back side along the edge of the plaque facing inwards. The center of the plaque, which most likely symbolizes the solar disk (gilded) with diverging rays, is decorated in the same way, but with the pyramids facing outwards from the circle. The “sun” is surrounded by engraved elk heads (Fig. 4).

Summarizing the above-mentioned findings and arguments of scholars, we may propose a preliminary outline for the appearance and further distribution of objects with the depictions of the signs of the sun and moon (or the crescent moon) in the Urals and Western Siberia. The appearance of such objects is associated with imported goods. Most of the eastern silver products reached the Urals not earlier than the 9th century (Darkevich, 1976b: 74). This stage may be illustrated by four Khwarezmian bowls from the Perm Cis-Ural region, the Anikovskaya dish from the Cherdynsky Uyezd of Perm Governorate, and the Nildino dish from the Severnaya Sosva. In all these cases, the celestial bodies are organically included into the compositions on the objects. The diskos from Berezovo, on which the sun and the moon were engraved by the local population, can be attributed to the same stage. The objects with images of celestial bodies, cast in the Ural-Siberian region, including the plaque from Shuryshkary, small bronze plaques with images of masks with diverging rays, silver anthropomorphic figurine, and the plaque from Ovolynkort belong to the 10th–12th centuries.

Finally, the plaque with the gilded solar sign and a series of silver plaques “with the falconer” belong to the 13th–14th centuries. The latter objects were found in important places: in the west, in the vicinity of Cherdyn; in the east, in the lower reaches of the Irtysh River and the Surgut region of the Ob; and in the north, in the Severnaya Sosva basin and the Anzhigort village





Fig. 2. Silver plaque with representations of a falconer, animals, and solar signs. Diameter 5.9 cm. 12th–14th centuries.



Fig. 3. Silver plaque with the representation of a falconer. Diameter 7.2 cm. 13th–14th centuries.

of the Shuryshkarsky District of the YNAO (where a silver plaque symbolized the face of the Khanty family guardian spirit) (Baulo, 2007: 147–148). We may suggest that the plaques with the representations of the falconer in fact mark the advance of the Voguls (the Mansi) from the Western Urals to their current places of residence. It is known that before the 14th–16th centuries, the Mansi lived much more to the west of the current areas, up to the Pechora River (the Cherdyn Voguls preserved their culture at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (Glushkov, 1900)). The territory outlined by the Mansi place names gradually decreased and partially moved in the direction from the west to the east and from the south to the north (Narody..., 2005: 199). This route can also be traced using a relatively conservative element of the traditional Mansi culture—the cultic paraphernalia, namely, the sacrificial veils with the representation of the rider. Their area in the 20th century was quite distinctive: the western border was Verkhoturys; the southern border was Karymkary (the Ob River); the eastern border was Yuilsk (the Kazym River), and the northern border was Khanty-Muzhi (the Malaya Ob River). The Mansi who came from the Cis-Urals to the Ob, brought the paraphernalia associated with the cult of *Mir-susne-khum* to their new places of residence.

We have already argued that the Iranian (in a broader sense, eastern, southern) roots of modern imagery that is present on the veils of the Mansi and the Khanty are quite obvious. Analyzing the influence of the representations



Fig. 4. Silver plaque with the representation of a solar sign surrounded by two elk heads. Diameter 10 cm. 13th–14th centuries.

located on silver plaques from Volga Bulgaria (“the falconer surrounded by animals and birds”) on the iconography of the Celestial Horseman on sacred veils, we have emphasized that the veils with the figure of a rider surrounded by animals and birds is a phenomenon of the Mansi culture, which was formed when the ancestors of the modern Mansi lived in the southern part of the Western



Fig. 5. Sacrificial veil with two figures of riders and signs of celestial bodies. Mid-20th century. The Synya Khanty.



Fig. 6. Sacrificial veil with seven figures of riders, representation of a bird, and signs of celestial bodies. Mid-20th century. The Lyapin Mansi.

Urals and had contacts with Volga Bulgaria (Gemuev, Baulo, 2001: 51–52).

We can see the signs of the moon and the sun next to the image of the rider on the plaques; in various variants, they are also present on the attributes of *Mir-susne-khum*, such as veils, belts, or helmets (see, e.g., (Ibid.: No. 39, 40, 59, 76, 85, 136, 146)). The first variant is associated with the joint representation of the sun and the moon: they can be placed around the head of the main character, repeating the location on the plaques “with the falconer” (Fig. 5), or separately, in front of the figures of the riders (Baulo, 2013: Fig. 181). The informants said, “*Mir-*

*susne-khum* rides around the earth. The sun goes around the earth, and so does the moon, thus the moon and the sun are on the veil”. The second variant is the image of the crescent moon next to a bird or anthropomorphic figure inside a circle, which symbolizes the rising sun (Fig. 6). More often, the bird is *Reitartan-uirishch*, the bird of *Ekva-pyrishcha*\*. The Mansi thus explained the crescent moon to the right of the bird: “...they would make the *yalpyn* (the sacrificial veil) at the half moon, and finish it during the full moon” (Gemuev, 1990: 36–37).

A belt with distinctive representations is known among the finds made in the areas of the Lyapin Mansi: it was made to be placed on the back of the deer (two animal figures) sacrificed to *Mir-susne-khum* (the rider), who rides around the earth day and night (the sun and the moon). A bird-like figure in a circle (in the sun) signifies the local guardian spirit *Tovlyng-Yipyg-oiku*—“The Winged Eagle-Owl Old Man” (Baulo, 2013: Fig. 196).

The remaining variants are associated with the sole representation of the solar sign. Most often this is a small “star” with seven rays above the head of the rider (Ivanov, 1954: 51, fig. 29) (Fig. 7), a large disk with rays, shown separately (Fig. 8)\*\* or together with images of birds—ornithomorphic guardian spirits of the Khanty families (Fig. 9), and the rider *Mir-vannty-kho*. More rare representations include the image of the sun as a stylized “centipede beetle”. This was found twice: on a veil (Fig. 10) and on the headwear of the family deity (Gemuev, Baulo, 1999: Fig. 46, c). We should also mention the variants with an anthropomorphic figure (Gemuev, Baulo, 2001: No. 48, 51) or representation of a bird (Ibid.: No. 45) inside a solar circle (without the joint presence of the crescent moon) or standing on the circle. The warrior’s helmet with four figures of *Mir-vannty-kho* stands out from among the objects: two of the figures represent ordinary riders, while the heads of other two are not shown, and their raised hands form the sign of the sun (Fig. 11).

The cultic attributes of the Ob Ugrians include a group of objects related to the cult of *Kaltas-ekva*—the main goddess who measures a person’s life. A pin cushion of woolen cloth would be made in the family of a girl at her birth, and would be brought as a gift to the goddess with the request to help the newborn become a good handywoman. Various stylized images are embroidered

\*The folklore name of *Mir-susne-khum*.

\*\*The “sun” here is close in shape to the solar sign on the silver plaque from Cherdyn (see Fig. 4).





Fig. 7. Helmet of *Mir-susne-khum* with the solar sign. 1920s–1930s. The Ob Mansi.



Fig. 8. Warrior's helmet with the solar sign. First third of the 20th century. The Shuryshkary Khanty.



Fig. 9. Sacred belt with the figures of birds and the solar sign. Mid-20th century. The Synya Khanty.

in the center of the pin cushions, including the *khatl*—‘the sun’; a bird figure is often present near the *khatl* (inside the circle) (Moldanova, 1999: 162, fig. 24, 5–7). This is a relatively old tradition. Thus, a pin cushion with the solar sign was found during the excavations at Fort Nadym in the layer of the mid-17th century (Kardash, 2009: 231).

Twice, solar signs have been found in the decoration of the cultic barns of the Mansi in the basin of the Severnaya Sosva: the sun with eight rays was depicted on the gable of the dwelling of the thunder god *Shchakhel-torum*, (Gemuev, 1990: 133); the sun and the moon were drawn with charcoal above the entrance hole of the sacred barn of *Torum-oiki* (*Mir-susne-khum*) (Gemuev, Baulo, 1999: 76–77). On the basis of Chernetsov's materials (1936–

1937), a decoration in the form of a solar sign was on the gable of a Mansi house on the upper reaches of the Severnaya Sosva River (Istochniki..., 1987: 209).

The signs of the celestial bodies do not often occur in the shamanic practices of the Ob Ugrians\*. We can

\*Perhaps this is caused by certain underdevelopment of shamanism among the northern groups of the Ob Ugrians. In developed shamanism, for example among the Selkups, representations of the sun and the moon often appear on breastplates (Ivanov, 1954: 70, fig. 54), tambourines (Ibid.: 70–71, 73–74), beaters of the tambourine (Ibid.: 77), and lids of birch-bark boxes for keeping the shaman's paraphernalia (Ibid.: 76).



Fig. 10. Sacrificial veil with the figures of horsemen and solar signs. Mid-20th century. The Sosva Mansi.



mention a quiver with arrows for shamanistic rituals in the dark yurt from the sacred barn in Loktokurt (the Ob Khanty). Stylized images of the sun with diverging rays and cross in the center are carved on the front (8 spec.) and back (4 spec.) walls of the quiver (Grevens, 1960: 434). A lead plaque (10.0 × 7.5 cm in size, 0.5 cm thick) in the form of a solar disk with diverging rays was found in a damaged shaman's sled in a sacred place of the Khanty, in the Polui River basin (Priuralsky District of the YNAO) (Fig. 12). An anthropomorphic figure wearing a "three-rayed crown" appears on the front of the plaque. Supposedly, this is the image of a deity or a shaman. Copper chains and a silver coin (5 kopeks) of



Fig. 11. Warrior's helmet with four figures of riders (the raised arms of two riders form the sign of the sun). 1950s. The Shuryshkary Khanty.

Fig. 12. Lead plaque in the form of a disk with outgoing rays. Mid-19th century. The Khanty from the Polui River.

1813 are attached to the lower beams of the plaque with leather straps.

An iron head of a deer with antlers, wrapped in two red scarves, was found in the sacred chest of the Lyapin Mansi (Baulo, 2013: Fig. 223). Tin and copper round plaques were attached to the head. The meaning of the composition can be associated with the understanding of the deer as a celestial animal (the Mansi mythology has stories of a deer running across the sky (Kannisto, Liimola, 1958: 89)), and the round disks denote the sun and the moon. All three objects can be dated to the late 19th century. Most likely, in earlier times, these were used as pendants in the shaman's outfit. The collection



of the Museum of Nature and Man (Khanty-Mansiysk) contains a wooden bird-like figure (XM-402), to which two round plaques (7.5 cm in diameter) made of white metal are tied. On the surface of one plaque, a representation of a human face is scratched. The objects were sent to the museum in 1939 from the Kazym National Council; they were taken from the shaman P.G. Togolmazov. In this case, the plaques probably also denoted the sun and the moon.

The signs of the celestial bodies play a certain role in the funeral rite: the sun and the moon are drawn with charcoal or chalk on the lid (on the lower plank in the middle Ob region) of the coffin, so that the deceased, having them with him, would not try to get out of the grave (Chernetsov, 1959: 144). Among the Khanty of the Beloyarsky District of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug–Yugra, before carrying out the body, a half-sun (*in that life, it will no longer shine so brightly*), full moon (*the night is there all the time, and the moon should shine*), and some animal similar to the elk, but without the tail, are drawn with charcoal on the right side of the coffin, near the head of the deceased. It is believed that the animal will carry the deceased to the Lower World. Drawings on the coffin can only be made by a male—a stranger or distant relative (Baulo, 2002: 62; Pyatnikova, 2008: 17).

Beyond religious attributes, the images of celestial bodies occur as the *tamgas* of the Ostyaks in the 17th century: the signs of the sun and the moon in the form of irregular circles with diverging rays, sometimes with a point in the center; the sign of the moon in the form of a semicircle with or without rays (Ivanov, 1954: 32, fig. 13, 10–14). In the well-known *toscher-voy* game of the Khanty and Mansi, wooden images of the moon and the sun are used (Shukhov, 1916: 111–112; Ivanov, 1970: 12, fig. 1, 8; and others).

## Conclusions

Using a variety of archaeological, folklore, ethnographic, and visual sources, this study generally supports the opinion of Kannisto and Karjalainen that the sun played an insignificant role in the beliefs of the Ob Ugrians and did not have its own religious significance. The celestial bodies in the worldview of these peoples are limited to personifications of the sun and the moon translated through myths and legends. Ritual practices take into account the lunar phases and the position of the sun.

Representations of the solar signs on the ritual artifacts of the Ob Ugrians occur mostly on objects associated with the cult of *Mir-susne-khum*. Some scholars (V.N. Chernetsov, I.N. Gemuev) considered his cult an echo of ancient cosmogonist beliefs, and the Celestial Horseman himself as a personification of the sun associated with the use of imported silver bowls in the rituals.

The sources currently available indicate that the objects with representations of celestial bodies appeared in the Urals and Western Siberia not earlier than in the 9th century, together with the general flow of eastern silver objects to the north. The first known engraved image of the sun and moon on an imported diskos belongs to the same period. Such objects cast in the Ural-Siberian region already became common in the 10th–12th centuries. Silver plaques with the representation of a falconer, which mark the movement of the Voguls from the Western Urals to the current places of residence, arrived in this territory in the 13th–14th centuries. This route can also be traced by the sacrificial veils of the Mansi: the scene of “the falconer surrounded by animals, the sun, and the moon” becomes transferred to cloth paraphernalia of *Mir-susne-khum* (veils, belts, and helmets).

Solar signs also occur on pin cushions—the sacrificial gifts to the supreme goddess *Kaltas-ekve*, on the gables of the barns of the celestial gods, and on a number of shaman's attributes; they play a role in the burial ritual and have been used for signing documents.

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