

ETHNOLOGY

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SACRED SPACE IN THE WORLDVIEW AND ART OF THE TUNGUS-MANCHU ETHNIC MINORITY, SAKHALIN ISLAND

The article contributes to research into concepts of sacredness held by the Tungus-Manchu ethnic minority living on Sakhalin Island. The study focuses on the Rukutama staff found by a hunter in 1972 on the Angurovka River, an old arm of the Rukutama River. The staff displays the spatial features of Sakhalin Island in great detail, all of which were included into the life cycle of the island's inhabitants. Sacred knowledge was transmitted over centuries via generations of shamans using the language of sacred compositions, "visual folklore." Visual art is central to the study of the ethnic history and culture of the modern inhabitants of Sakhalin Island.

Keywords: *Rukutama staff, sacred space, Sakhalin, North Asia, Tungus-Manchu ethnic minority, Evenki, Uilta.*

Introduction

This article continues explorations into the concept of sacred space held by the Tungus-Manchu ethnic minority living on Sakhalin Island (Fig. 1). The study is focused on the Rukutama staff which was found by hunter A.S. Filippov in 1972 on the Angurovka River, an old arm of the Rukutama River. The artifact was subsequently delivered to the Poronaysk Museum of Regional Studies (Sakhalin Province). The first publication on the staff was provided by V.D. Fedorchuk (1995), Director of the Museum. The main subjects of sacred space represented on the Rukutama staff have been discussed in a previous article by the present author (Missonova, 2011). The study of perceptions of space both on Earth and in the Upper, Middle, and Lower worlds reveals the

essence of the worldview which formed over centuries of ethnic culture on Sakhalin Island (Yamamoto Yuko, 1943). The painting by Shoji Kimura, "Meeting of the Shamans (in Otasu grove). Sakhalin" (Fig. 2) shows a shaman conducting a ritual dance (kamlanie ritual for the healing of a baby rescued from drowning). Sketches for this painting* were made in 1938 in Otasu (presently the Poronaysk Region of Sakhalin Province, where the staff was found), but the artist worked on the painting until the end of his life and did not consider it finished. Visual methods combined with the social status of the agent helped to preserve and transmit accumulated knowledge.

*Preserved in the personal archive of the artist, now at his son's Hiroki Kimura.



Fig. 1. Rukutama staff (Poronaisk Museum of Regional Studies, No. 194-1) and “Map of the Sakhalin Peninsula by I.F. Krusenstern. 1805” (*Istoriya Sakhalina...*, 2008: 328).



Fig. 2. Fragment of a painting by Soji Kimura (Memorial Gallery of Arts, Hakodate, 1991). Photograph by L.I. Missonova. 2008.

Visual arts as a means of transmitting knowledge of the island as sacred space

Attention should be drawn to the line running along the Rukutama staff (Fig. 3). An old Japanese map of Sakhalin (1868–187?), which shows the boundaries of the conventional division “into estates,”* shows the main division of the island in the same way as it is depicted on the staff. From the lower pass of Poyasok the line passes along Kamyshovy ridge of the Western Sakhalin Mountains to Nikolsky pass, then across the Poronai floodplain along the Poronai River. The line passes through the divisions, between several rivers until reaching the Gulf of Pomr. On the modern geographical map, after the floodplain of the Poronai, this line continues to the area of the village of Smirnykh, along the Tsentralny ridge (parallel to the Poronai River), the Nabilsky ridge, then shifts to the left where it joins the Nysh River, ending in the same place as the river itself (*Spravochnik...*, 2003).

*“Karafuto Chizu,” “Map of Karafuto” (in Japanese), was made in the early years of the Meiji period (1868–1912). Currently it is kept in the Research Department of the North at the Library of Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan. Scroll “Jiku mono” No. 16. ID: 0D01849000000000.

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