

The image of the universe in the folklore of the Nenets: Systematic and phenomenological analysis. Elena Pushkareva. 2019. Sankt-Peterburg: IstorichEskaya illiustratsiya. 280 p, hard-cover, illustrated. ISBN 978-5-89566-195-6. € 30.00.

The Image of the Universe in the Folklore of the Nenets written by Dr Elena Pushkareva is one of the richest works representing Nenets folklore and culture from a perspective of a native speaker and a professional and trained researcher. Elena Pushkareva managed to collect, preserve and analyse the huge collection of the Nenets folklore texts. Some of these texts are even familiar to the author from her early childhood. Based on the materials of Nenets folklore, the author introduces an original interpretation of the meaning of every level of the Nenets Universe, its space and a place of every living being in contemporary everyday life in the tundra. Besides, Pushkareva gives a very detailed description of the Nenets religion and traditional worldview in connection to the specifics of the Nenets archaic worldview and how this spiritual culture epitomised in the tundra and in a human dwelling – *chum*. Her analysis of the Nenets epic songs *syudbabs*, *syudbabsarka*, *yarabs*, *yarabsarka*, *khynabs* and myth tales *lakhanako* gives a new interpretation of spoken and silenced energy of the Word. Moreover, the author describes a semantic language of a shaman and his assistant- *teltanggoda*, who by repeating the shamanic songs, interprets the shaman's words into a language, understandable by ordinary Nenets people.

The book has the following structure. In Introduction *Folklorists and Ethnographic literature on the world view of the Nenets*, Elena Pushkareva gives information about the history of research and complexity of the Nenets folklore study with a list of published literature. In the first chapter *Universe in the epic songs and Myths tales of the Nenets*, Elena Pushkareva makes a structural analysis of the Nenets world structure by outlining the complex organisation of the Inner Universal existence as an opposition of the cosmos and the land. This considerably alters the established scientific opinion about the three-part structure of the worldview macrocosm: high world, middle world and the low world. Moreover, in Nenets culture, they are connected with each other by vertical and horizontal lines. What is interesting to notice is that the author associates to the male and the female spaces similar to the opposition of the cosmos and the earth. Based on this, Pushkareva explains that Nenets epic songs and mythic tales tell about the opposition of men, which is associated with the cosmos or the high world where the central figure is a male demiurge Num. While the women represent the cosmos–earth structure of the middle world and the low world with an old female figure *Yaminy* as its centre. This opposition of the cosmos and the earth has many connections, but mostly by their common inhabitants and shamans who can only travel between these two worlds.

The second chapter *The system of Personalities, the inhabitants of the Universe* is dedicated to description of the main inhabitants of the cosmos given in the Nenets mythic and epic songs. While inhabitants of the earth can live in: (1) the sky and the land, (2) the land, (3) the land and the underground and also in (4) the water. They can be mythic and real. To prove this, the author gives a list of names and Nenets family names carefully chosen from the Nenets folklore texts. Many of these names do not exist in Nenets contemporary life. Therefore, the author believes that Nenets folklore texts constitute as a sort of the Nenets archive and tell about the history of the tundra and its inhabitants. However, it is obvious that the Nenets epic songs and myths provide a rich source of information about the Nenets history, their economic activities, transport, equipment, houses, clothing, production tools and social relationship. Opposite to humans, other living creatures – inhabitants of the middle world and the underground world – are figures, mainly hostile to humans. Their destruction and marginalisation from a territory of the middle world is the goal of any man who comes in contact with them. While the residents of the water world are very few and characterised sketchily and are simply named without any description. Pushkareva noticed that in comparison with the residents of the water world, there are only a few residents of the cosmos. However, they can transform themselves into different shapes and roles in order to occupy an alien space of the earth for their specific purposes.

In the next chapter three “*Word – Wada*” in *Nenets folklore (personages of super-energy as an emanation of the Universe)*, Elena Pushkareva joined these spaces of the Universe and its inhabitants and let them communicate by the special immaterial energy of a spoken and unspoken word. The meaning of Word is recognised in the book as a superpower of the cosmos which

comes to the earth. This power is described in Nenets folklore texts *yarabts*, *sydbabts* and *lakhanako* with a message that any spoken word has specific information coming from the high world. While the underground world usually is silent. However, the explanation to this is also in the same folklore texts: any contact with inhabitants of the underground world is dangerous for living beings. In the last chapter *A shaman in the Nenets worldview*, the author states that even the Nenets shamans are mediators between the high, the middle and the underground (low) worlds, but they do not have any words by themselves. According to the folklore texts, they can get the special power of spoken words from the cosmos. It comes to them similar to the light and the warmth of the sun during the day. While those shamans which can travel to the underground, to the world of the dead, get another power of words, which is cold and silent like a moonlight. That is why the Nenets shamans call the middle world *syamei* or transformed. It is one of the distinctive features of the book: the author gives a new meaning to the Nenets concept *syamei*, as a special transformed power of the ground and underground, opposite to the power of the cosmos. Elena Pushkareva translates it as a power of transformation, which is dangerous for humans and any living beings of the earth. Though, the earth is the only place to live for humans, animals and all spirits of the land. The Nenets shamans make the power

of gotten words to ring with the help of their shamanic drums. In the Nenets contemporary life, there are not many shamans left. This part of Nenets culture was seriously damaged during the early collectivisation time when many shamans were executed or punished. However, some old Nenets shamanic drums are still kept by families of previous shamans. In this book, there is a story about treating an injured shamanic drum and returning it the power to give a spoken voice.

In the appendix of the book, there are two Nenets epic texts with English translation, which let the reader get an introduction to Nenets folklore, its characters and specifics of performing two different genres of the Nenets narratives. This book has many good photos of the tundra and the Nenets people. It has rich folkloristic and ethnographic value. The book is meant for folklorists, ethnographers, historians, archeologists, students in humanities, as well as anyone interested in the spiritual culture of the people of the North. I am familiar with the Russian versions of this book, but I found it very beneficial to have it is also in English. (Roza Laptander, Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Hamburg (UHH), Hamburg, Germany (roza.laptander@uni-hamburg.de))

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