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SHRINES OF ALHANAY: MYTHOLOGY AND RITES IN THE SACRALIZATION OF OBJECTS

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Abstract

Sacred Mount Alhanay is one of the oldest and well-preserved natural temples, which are places of special worship and religious rites. In shaman mythology, the master of sacred Mount Alhanai is believed to be *Haan buudal Alag haan*, his wife *Altan zayasha hatan*, who patronage the vast territories of the nine large valleys of *Ara Halha* (Northern Mongolia). The sacred object of Alhanay acquires a new cultural layer of influence of Buddhism and Buddhist mythology in the late 19th century. In the materials of the article devoted to Mount Alhanay, we can state the presence of all correlated criteria of the concept of "cultural landscape," the connection with the solar cult and the rite location with the updating of the Buddhist pantheon. Sacred Mount Alhanai in traditional religious views of the buryat remains in line with the «host spirits» of Western and Eastern Trans Baikal. According to the analysis of the materials, it can be concluded that the religious tradition on sacred Mount Alhanay continues to conform to the mythological system of adoration of sacred territory and the rite component of the local population, while prevailing Buddhist pantheon and Buddhist practices. Sacred sites and territories are in an intermediate bundle, which in subsequently actualizes and supports both the traditional ecosystem and traditional indigenous culture. This is where the universality of myths and social adaptive practices lie in the cult paradigm of traditional religious systems.

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1. Introduction

Sacred Mount Alhanay (bur. Alhana), along with Olhon, *Munko-Sardag*, *Barhan Uula*, *Shalsaana buural baabai*, etc., is one of the significant religious sites, a pilgrimage center of Buryat, the entire population of the Transbaikalian region, the Republic of Buryatia and the Baikal region as a whole. Among the 100 natural protected natural areas, the National Park "Alhanay" is considered quite young (20 years since its creation), besides, the easternmost park in Russia. Unlike other parks, apart from the unique natural component, there is a natural-cult complex – the shrine of northern Buddhism (Nazarov, 2007). Sacred Mount Alhanay is one of the oldest and well-preserved natural temples, the object of special worship and religious rites. The most detailed historical and cultural description, including religious making is submitted in works as Gerasimova (1969), Mikhaylov (1987), Galdanova (1987), Syrtyanova (2001, 2004, 2007), Zhukovskaya (2008) of the collective *monograph* by researchers (Nanzatov, Nikolayeva, Sodnompilova, & Shaglanova 2008). Of particular interest are the works of local shamans combining shaman practice with research of objects of religious importance (Bazarov, 2000; Gomboyev, 2010).]

2. Problem Statement

One of the most important tasks is the study of traditional religious beliefs of the peoples of Siberia, aimed at clarifying their role in the process of modern ethnic development. Today, dynamic processes of development of the peoples of Russia, including drilling in the field of education, culture, medical care, as well as in the sphere of modern information technologies, displace traditional culture, local religious practice. At the same time, archaic religious ideas related to places of worship continue to exist in Buryatia and the districts of Transbaikalia. Considering the sacred Mount Alhanay, on the example of the mythological series, rite folklore, it is possible for us to show the cult practice in the sacred territory, which has recently gained special development under the influence of Buddhism at the junction of the religious component and the preservation of the natural territory.

3. Research Questions

Evidence of ancient worship. The south of Transbaikalia has long been part of the space of nomadic tribes that left a mark on world history. Shrines of Alhanay, being the highest tops Priononya and having ancient names *Shuluun Undur*, *Alag Haan* (in translation "The stone mountain", "The motley tsar") "were esteemed long before Genghis Khan's times. Evidence of this is the presence of majestic stone tombs of representatives of tribes of culture of tile graves (V–VII centuries BC). Worship continued in later times with the tribes of shivei, tabgach, xianbi, dada, mengu (ancestors of Mongols) (II–X centuries AD). However, in ancient historical documents of references to Alhanay, the author of the work did not find (Nazarov, 2007).

Issues of folk etymology. There are many folk etymologies, and judging by Turko-Mongolian and Evenkian traditional worldviews, the names of Alhanay, are related to the leader of Baljin-hatun (from the word "Alakhan – kill"), to Ancient Turk etymology ("alha – praise"), to the version of Ononian hamnigans ("Alag buguty"). According to informants, the most popular versions are considered by local

residents to be versions with the historical personality of Balzhin-khatun, with the legendary Alag-Khan and versions related to Evenki origin, without specifying – the version "call spirits" or another version "cult stones".

Modern practices of worship. Mass visit to the territory of the park during the season and functioning of various directions of activity of the park causes interest in modern practices of preservation and use of natural and cultural heritage objects – introduction of religious and pilgrimage tours, medical and health sessions and other general strengthening procedures.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this work is to identify the local features of traditional religious beliefs (shamanic practices) in the cult place of Alhanay in the context of the prevalence of Buddhist mythological systems for the adoration of the object (as the abode of the deity Damchog).

5. Research Methods

In the study we used ethnographic methods of description, analysis of published materials existing today by means of historical and comparative method, cross-cultural analysis, method of interviewing (informants), method of included observation.

6. Findings

In comparative terms, one can consider the World Heritage Site sacred Mount Wutai as the most massively revered Buddhist. This object is of religious importance for Mongolian people, particularly for buryat, the second object of pilgrimage after Lhasa (Tibet). According to Buddhist mythology, the sacred mountains of Wutai are the seat of the bodhisatva wisdom Manjushri or Wengshu in the Chinese version. At the same time, the Wutai Mountains are one of the abode of the deity Samwara (Damchoga), as is the sacred Mount Alhanay. On materials of researchers, in the year of iron-sheep (1871) on the signs of dreams and other signs, Dacheng hutuhtu made a guesswork and confirmed that Mount Alhanay is in fact the abode of the deity Damchog, and called this mountain the Glorious Abode, the Great Virtue (Syrtypova, 2004). Similar mythological series combines these objects, but in historical and geographical terms quite differ.

Curious is the version of the legend, which confirms the "connection" between the two religious objects – about the expediency of holding a rite of veneration in Alhanay, before visiting the sacred mountains of Wutai (Syrtypova, 2004). In principle, it is understandable, with existing practices in traditional cultures, to carry out a rite «open the way». This is probably about visiting Mount Alhanay.

In shaman mythology, the master of sacred Mount Alhanay, according to the materials of the practicing shaman Gomboyev (2010), is considered *Haan buudal Alag haan*, his wife *Altan zayaasha khatan*, who patronage the vast territories of the nine large valleys of *Ara Halha* (Northern Mongolia). Shamans for centuries performed prayers and rituals in this territory, turned to the Forever Blue Sky, the creator of the Universe, *Tengeriins*-residents, deities who left the heavens – «*haan buudalam*», *buuralam*, «*spirits-ezhins*» of the area, also to the ongons of tribes and genera. According to shaman tradition the

Alhanay belongs to «*Haan buudal*» and is called under equivalent synonyms: "*Naran talyn Haan*", "*Hoymor talyn Haan*", "*Haan buudal Alag haan*", "*Buural haan*". Similar places are always distinguished by the unusual location, landscape, rare phenomena of nature, supernatural, sacrament:

- «Asari tengeriin oroihoo
Altan shargal naraar giiguulhen
Altankhan oroyta Alhanamnai
Adistai murgeltei unenhen,
Arbanhan sahuysanai buudaltai
Aga njutagaim shutoon...» (Gomboyev, 2010).

Translation:

«From the height of Asari Heaven
Cast with sun rays,
Alhanay golden tops
From the dedication of Buddhist deities.
As the seat of our patrons,
The shrine of Aga Land...» (translated by Gomboyev).

Given the above call dedicated to Mount Alhanay, we can state the existence of all the correlating criteria of the concept of "cultural landscape," the connection with the solar cult (*hara esege mete, shargal naran ehe mete*) and the rite location with the updating of the Buddhist pantheon. However, sacred Mount Alhanay was and remains one of the main markers in the space-time continuum, an object of natural and cultural heritage.

According to materials collected in Kizhinginsky in the Hori districts of Buryatia (Gomboyev, 2006), the «host spirits» of *Shalsaana buural baabai* in the Kizhinga Valley and Alhanay in the Transbaikial region refer to one row of mythological rank (*sabdaguud*) and «help» each other, if of course, in the text of their prize.

According to the local leaders, «the residents of *Ara-Halha* have worshipped Alhanay since to buddhist times. Supreme shamans through the Temple Gate made sacrifices to 13 host spirits, including Olhon Island, Baikal Lakes and the peaks around it. The natural-cult complex of Alhanay, consisting of 17 cult objects, became the embodiment of religious traditions and a symbol of many tribes and genera of Eastern Transbaikalia, equally honoring both buddhism and shamanism" (Nazarov, 2007).

The specifics of traditional religious views are drilled in their work rightly noted by the famous the scientist across Mongolia Zhukovskaya (2008) that the established symbiosis of shamanism and buddhism is a fact of its cultural and ecological space. In her opinion, for most, shamanism represents their connection with their native land and the world of ancestors, protect the peace of their descendants, warn them of dangers or troubles, but in exchange require care and memory of themselves, perform certain rites in their honor. At the same time, she writes, buddhism, like any great religion, had already managed to develop a tolerant attitude towards the partner, taking under its cover a large part of its rite practice and pantheon of the most significant shaman deities and spirits (Zhukovskaya, 2008).

It is obvious that the mythological layer of the object is erased over time, the process of remifologization takes place, as a result of which versions and strata of later historical periods remain.

The fact that the sacred object of Alhanay is acquiring a new cultural layer of influence of Buddhism and Buddhist mythology in the late 19th century, this was possibly facilitated: the active position of Namnaanai Lama, his long-standing buddhist practices and the patronage of the clergy of Tibet.

The buddhist history of Alhanay begins in 1859. At this time, *Shagdar Namnaanai*, being a young lama of Tsugolsky datsan, elected Alhanay a place for spiritual practice. Near *Yyden sumé* (Temple Gate) he built a beating house and after some time engaged in confrontation with local shamans in order to force them to leave Alhanay. On top of the mountain they were installed a wallpaper (cult structure), on which for a long time carried out rituals of buddhist offerings, thus beginning to spread the teachings of the Buddha on the banks of the river Ilya (Nazarov, 2007).

The most recent events include, for example, the arrival of the Dalai Lama XIV Tenzin Gyazo Sodnom Jamzo in 1991. Today, on the territory of the National Park "Alhanay" there are many buddhist buildings, religious objects (dugans, stupas). Among them are 8 Buddhist stands built in honor of the arrival of the Dalai Lama and the consecration of the sacred territory of the park.

As Batomunkueva (2012, 2013) writes, in Buryatia there are changes in geography and the list of priority cults related to the strengthening of buddhist influence in certain areas... Perhaps in the future in the context of the sacral geography of the region, the list of sacral peaks in the system of five khans will be as follows: Humun Khan, Burin Khan, Alhanay, Munku Sardyk, Barhan.

On the territory of Alhanay Park the chapel (*bumhan*) is a kind of stone structure, 2x2 wide, up to 2 m high. As Namnaanay Lama was noted above (it a lama and the great Buddhist scientist of Jantchib Od, Light of contemplation, Shagdar Namnaanay, Namnaanay-bagsha) lived many years in lonely and beautifully places of Alhanay and devoted the life to consecration of the sacred mountain, defined names of rocks and proved buddhist interpretation.

One of the most popular and visited objects on Alhanay is *Yyden sume* (Gate Temple). The buddhist claim that the Temple Gate is the gate through which people enter the world of the deity Damchog, other locals say that through this arch the deities or host spirits of the area connect with other cult places of Trans Baikal and Buryatia, especially with the deities of Olhon Island, the head of the 13 northern patron deities. Under the arch there is a buddhist stupa-*suburgan* about 2 meters high, constructed 1864 year on the instruction of Namnaanai Lama (in the 1930s it was destroyed, but was restored 1956).

It is clear that on this object the anthropogenic load is large (especially in summer months), the offerings of pilgrims (coins, ritual scarves-*hadaguud*), the trodden tracks are visible. It should be noted that the area is entirely influenced by buddhist traditions and clerics. At the foot of the Gate Temple, an 25 *hural Sogshid* dedicated to the deity Damchog is held annually on the day of the summer month according to the lunar calendar.

Mother's belly or *Ehyn Umai* (bur.) is one of the most visited cult and mysterious places of Alhanay. Close to the Gate Temple (approximately 250-300 m.), after a heavy climb through huge boulders, is a grotto, on a mountain slope at vast stone sprouts with sizes about four meters long and up to about a meter (70 cm) high. It is possible to go inside the cave and make offerings. Usually visit the grotto those families who have no children, pray and ask «souls» of children, while scraping stones from the bottom of the cave (if something gets caught, then everything will be solved in a prosperous way).

The composition of the offerings is different: coins, sweets, part from rite food and food (pieces from ritual food – *edeeney deej*), tissue flaps, etc.

The hope of becoming parents attracts a large number of childless women to a given place. When carrying out ritual we asked children, at the same time, women leave children's toys (depending on sex – boy (car), girl (doll)). There are also those who were lucky enough to give birth to children after visiting the cave of Mother's belly – Ebyn Umai. Unlike the previous ones, they thank the "host spirit" of this object and present gifts – if the son, then his toy (for example, cars), if the daughter, then something from her toys (dolls, for example).

In addition to Buddhist cult objects, we were interested in the traditional cult place – Alhanay wallpaper. It is located 400 meters from this object, on top of the adjacent nozzle. According to the materials, the Alkhanay large wallpaper was built in 1891 according to the drawings of Namnaanai Lama under his personal leadership. So far, thanks to the care of believers, the unique domed steps-*munhans* have survived to the present day in their original form. The complex of places of worship consists of 53 stone buildings of different sizes of oval shape, which differs significantly from other forms of movement and places of worship in neighboring regions, in particular in Buryatia (Nazarov, 2007). According to the researchers, of them 1 – large in the center, 4 – smaller on four sides, 44 – small in two rows of six. As a result – 49 *munkhans* with 4 sacrificial furnaces (*baypurs*) (Syrtypova, 2007). According to field materials, only two furnaces are used today.

The main *munhan* (chapel) is a two-tier structure, the lower part of which has a dome-shaped building. The length of the sides – 4 meters, height – 1.66 m. The second tier is represented to the dump by a hemisphere – is a symbol of the Universe, diameter in the base – 1.5 meters, and height – 2.5 meters. On four sides of the structure, at a distance of 10 meters there are open hotbeds-smokers, called *baypurs*, intended for ritual fires, where sacrificial products are burned. The main oven is 20 meters south-east of the rest, its height is two meters, the shape is quadrangular, well-shaped cavity is 1.5 meters high from the ground. The thirteenth day according to the lunar calendar of the middle of summer is performed by the visiting prayer-*hural* on the Alhanay ritual place – the worship ceremony-*tahilgan*. The rite is conducted by invited buddhist priests-*lama* from Aginsky datsan and from other nearby datsans. Under their choral performance of the praise anthem to the master of Alhanay, accompanied by drum fraction and bell ringing, deities of four sides and eight directions of space are invited to consecrate, and with them – owners of local mountains. Sacrificial food includes milk, tea with milk, vodka, sweets. Then products are burned after consecration on bypass pools. Spirits are known to feed on pairs and smells – *honshuu*. Locals, called *obo-tahilgan* not only a religious rite, but also a summer holiday. Therefore, as part of the rite, residents of the surrounding villages held *zunai naadan* – a summer holiday (Nazarov, 2007). At present, apart from the religious component, it is called the traditional summer holiday – *Surharbaan*.

7. Conclusion

According to the results of the study, sacred Mount Alhanay continues to correspond to the mythological system of adoration of the sacred territory and the rite component of the local population, prevailing in the pantheon of Buddhism and Buddhist practices. From time immemorial of centuries, shaman mythology remained the prerogative for rite support of similar cult and sacred territories. The

practice of tolerant use of such objects, still remains in many sacred places of Buryatia, for example, if we compare the cult place of Barhan Uula, where each other religious events are held according to both shaman and buddhist traditions, according to shaman and buddhist mythological contexts.

It is the places of worship that are in the intermediate bundle, which in subsequently actualizes and supports both the traditional ecosystem and the traditional culture of indigenous peoples, in particular the Baikal region, Northern Mongolia (*Ara Halha*) in general. This is where the universality of myths and social adaptive practices lie in the cult paradigm of traditional religious systems.

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