

On the Variability of Chukchi Traditional Singing and Incantation Practices (Research Note)

À propos de la variabilité des pratiques incantatoires et du chant tchouktches

О вариативности традиционной песенно-заговорной практики чукчей

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Article abstract

This paper concerns the little-known, largely archaic practices of traditional Chukchi songs and incantations. Use is made of the unique Chukchi language materials of Vladimir Bogoraz, recorded by that scholar in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as hitherto unknown sources from the author's unpublished field materials, collected in Chukotka in the second half of the 20th and early 21st centuries, and here introduced into scientific circulation.

On the Variability of Traditional Singing and Incantation Practice of the Chukchi (Research Note)

Zoia Vladimirovna Weinstein-Tagrinaⁱ

AUTHOR

Zoia Weinstein-Tagrina is a Chukchi artist, singer, musician, and throat singing performer. She is the daughter of famous Chukchi composer Galina Tagrina. In 2009, she defended a PhD thesis in Saint Petersburg at the Russian State Pedagogical University, entitled “The phenomenon of the personal song in the traditional culture of the Chukchi.”

ABSTRACTⁱⁱ

This paper concerns the little-known, largely archaic practices of traditional Chukchi songs and incantations. Use is made of the unique Chukchi language materials of Vladimir Bogoraz, recorded by that scholar in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as hitherto unknown sources from the author’s unpublished field materials, collected in Chukotka in the second half of the 20th and early 21st centuries, and here introduced into scientific circulation.

KEYWORDS

Personal songs (*Чиниткинэт грэпыт; Sinitkinet grepyt*), family shamanic songs (*Ильуткукинэт грэпыт; Il’utkukinet grepyt*), sacral dedicatory singing (*Нильунильуткун; Nil’unil’utkun*), incantation practice of the Chukchi (*Эвьанвыт; ev’ianvyt*)

AUTEURE

Zoia Weinstein-Tagrina est Tchouktche, musicienne, chanteuse et interprète de chants de gorge. Elle est la fille de la célèbre compositrice tchouktche Galina Tagrina. En 2009, elle a soutenu une thèse de doctorat à Saint-Pétersbourg, à l’Université pédagogique d’État de Russie, intitulée « Le phénomène du chant personnel dans la culture traditionnelle des Tchouktches ».

RÉSUMÉ

À propos de la variabilité des pratiques incantatoires et du chant tchouktches

Ce texte porte sur les pratiques peu connues et largement archaïques des chants et incantations traditionnels tchouktches. Il s’appuie sur les documents uniques en

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ii. Translated from Russian by Benjamin McGarr

langue tchouktche de Vladimir Bogoraz, enregistrés par ce chercheur à la fin du XIX^e siècle et au début du XX^e siècle, ainsi que sur des sources jusqu'ici inconnues provenant des documents de terrain non publiés de l'auteur, collectés en Tchoukotka dans la seconde moitié du XX^e siècle et au début du XXI^e siècle, et ici présentés dans une forme scientifique.

MOTS-CLÉS

Chants personnels (*Чиниткинэт грэпыт*; *Ĉinitkinèt grèpyt*), chants chamaniques familiaux (*Ильуткукинэт грэпыт*; *Il'utkukinèt grèpyt*), le chant sacré votif (*Нильунильуткун*; *Nil'unil'utkun*), pratique incantatoire des Tchouktches (*Эвъянвыт*; *èv"janvyt*)

АВТОР

Зоя Владимировна Венстен-Тагрина – чукотская певица, музыкант, исполнительница горлового пения. Она дочь известного чукотского композитора Галины Тагриной. В 2009 году Зоя Владимировна защитила кандидатскую диссертацию в Санкт-Петербурге в Российском государственном педагогическом университете по теме «Феномен личной песни в традиционной культуре чукчей».

АННОТАЦИЯ

О вариативности традиционной песенно-заговорной практики чукчей

В статье освещаются малоизвестные, во многом архаичные, традиционные песенная и заговорная практики чукчей. Используются уникальные материалы Владимира Богораз на чукотском языке, записанные ученым в конце XIX- начале XX вв. Вводятся в научный оборот неизвестные источники из полевых материалов автора, собранные на Чукотке во второй половине XX и начале XXI вв.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА

Чиниткинэт грэпыт – Личные песни; *Ильуткукинэт грэпыт* – семейные шаманские песни; *Нильунильуткун* – сакральное посвятительное пение; *Эвъянвыт* – заговорная практика чукчей.

Traditional songs and incantations are widespread in Chukchi ritual practices associated with calendric and thanksgiving festivals. They also represent an extensive repertoire of magical applications.

Personal Songs

One of the most widespread genres in Chukchi traditional song culture is the personal song *Чиниткин грэн*¹ (*Sinitkin grep*). Thanks to the tradition

1. Words in Chukchi are provided in Cyrillic (the official way Chukchi is written today) and in transliteration. Excerpts of texts in Chukchi are provided only in Cyrillic. Long

preserved in the Chukchi singing culture of giving a song to a specific person, the Personal Song has the character of individualized and hereditary song. It occupies a special place and is related to durable family ritual objects and practices² as well as to the tribal songs passed down from generation to generation (Bogoraz 1900, XXXV). It should be stated that due to its intonational and rhythmic flexibility, the personal song provides the performer with additional opportunities, and the improvisational nature of these songs enables them to be repeated several times in a row (Vensten-Tagrina 2018).

Individual personal songs can constitute programmatic texts for ritual purposes. As such, in one personal song, the lyrics are as follows:

*Нэвыск'этти, мыныгрэн!
Эмчимгэутэ мыныгрэммык.
Грэн н'откэн мынъяагъан.
Н'инк'эгтури, к'илюльэтгытык!*

Женщины, спойте ритуальную песню!
Все наши мысли вложим в песню.
Ритуальную эту споем.
Дети, выходите на обрядовый танец!

Women, let's sing a ritual song!
Let's put all our thoughts into a song.
Let's sing this ritual.
Children, go out to the ritual dance!
(Incantation №5, Bogoraz 1910–1913, 138)

Ritual Songs

Ritual songs connected with calendric and thanksgiving holidays may include texts that directly indicate the order in which the ritual action is to be carried out (Vensten-Tagrina 2007, 64). For example, one of the ritual songs performed at the spring *Baidara* (canoe, in Russian) Festival has the following lyrics:

*Увэлельоот гаграпчаленат, и'нчувильыт гилюльэтлинэт,
Нэвыск'этти гэпугурэтлинэт, нуукэльыт гилюльэтлинэт,*

quotations or excerpts of texts are provided in Chukchi, Russian (translation by the author, Z. Weinstein-Tagrina), and English (translation by B. McGarr) [note from the editors].

2. In Russian, *святынь* (*sviatyn'*). Here it refers at the same time to sacred tangible objects and sacred intangible practices and knowledge [note from the editors].

*БҮтвыннилъыт гэнкэвычбэчевлинэт,
Имъэлилъыт гапалёмтэлленат о’ратчекыт*

Уэленцы пели ритуальные песни, инчоунцы танцевали,
Женщины исполняли обрядовый танец, науканцы танцевали,
Изготовившие байдары (устроители) имели удовольствие
(от происходящего),
Юноши из Имелина слушали.

The Uelen people sang ritual songs, the Inchoun people danced,
The women performed a ritual dance, the Naukan people danced,
Those who made canoes (the organizers) took pleasure
(in what was happening),
The Imelin youths listened.

(Incantation N°2, Bogoras 1910–1913, 138)

This song contains the entire program of the celebration dedicated to the *baidara* canoe. During such festivals among coastal Chukchi, an invitation is sent out to the residents of several nearby Chukchi and Yupik villages, whose names are mentioned in this song: Uelen, Inchoun, Naukan, and Im’elin (the Chukchi name for Ratmanov Island). All invitees are assigned a specific role and the place of each participant in the event is indicated: the organizers of the holiday are those who “made the canoe”; the women perform a ritual dance; the Uelen guests sing ritual songs; the residents of the settlements of Inchoun and Naukan perform dances; and the Im’elin people are the listeners.

Family Shamanic Songs

One of the less well-known areas of Chukchi singing is called *ильуткукинэт грэныт* (*il’utkukinet grepyt*)—family shamanic songs.³ These form an obligatory part of the family shaman song ceremony of the autumn ritual holiday *Мн’эгыргын* (*Mn’egyrbyn*)—“Thanksgiving” (Vensten-Tagrina 2014). *Нильунильуткун* (*Nil’unil’utkun*, translated from Chukchi as “a ceremony of singing songs for reindeer does”) as well as family shamanic songs are the traditional songs associated with the *Mn’ègyrbyn* festival. These songs are dedicated to and have a beneficial effect on female livestock; in this case, on females whose young have been sacrificed.

3. Family shamanic singing differs from the professional performances made by *эн’эн’ыльыт* (*en’en’yl’yt*, Chukchi shamans). The main difference lies in the use of altered states of consciousness, which professional shamans use for their “journeys”.

We shall now also take note of the fact that the morpheme *ильу-* (*il'u*—from the root *ильуткук/il'utkuk*) is present in a number of the following terms. *Нильунильуткун* (*nil'unil'utkun*) is a ritual chant for female deer (Weinstein-Tagrina 2007, 261), as discussed above. This compound word includes two terms. The first part of the incorporative word *нильу*—(*nil'u-*) denotes a connection with specialized sacred singing. The second part of the linguistic incorporation—*нильэт* (- *nil'et* from *нильэтык* / *nil'etyk*, to lull or rock to sleep)—is used in the lullaby genre, as well as in ritual singing. It is attributed to a living reindeer doe, in one case, and associated in dedicatory singing with the “rocking side to side” of other ritually hunted game or sacrificial animals with which a thanksgiving feast is held. For example, the term *нильунильэтык* (*nil'unil'etyk*), according to accounts from coastal Chukchi, is used in relation to the ritual “cradle-like rocking motion” of the *умк'ы* (*umk'y*, Chukchi) polar bear: “After the *нынильэтк'инэт* (*nynil'etk'inet*) sacrifices, heads ‘lulled’ all night long, *нынильэтк'инэт* (*nynil'etk'inet*)—‘they played shamanic songs on the *iarar* [drum]’. They sang songs, as is usual now,” adds the informant.⁴ According to the recollections of reindeer Chukchi of Provideniya District, “lullaby” songs were also sung for the animal at the Polar Bear Festival: “It was obligatory, after each polar bear hunt, to perform a ceremony like the Festival. If there were reindeer, they slaughtered the reindeer [...]. *Нильуткук'инэт* (*nil'utkuk'inet*), too—they performed ritual shamanic singing [...]. Somebody sang songs, as though *нынильэтк'инэт* (*nynil'etk'inet*)—they were rocking, lulling to sleep” [the bear—Z. W.-T.].⁵

A variant of ritual singing—*нильунильуткун* (*nil'unil'utkun*)—of an incantatory and protective nature was also used by shamans when attending to the deceased during the funeral ceremony. I. S. Vdovin was thus able to note the existence of “lullaby” melodies of a relict nature on the Anadyr River, citing the example of a shaman participating in funeral singing while accompanying the deceased *к гыргочан'рамкэты* (*k gyrgosan'ramkety*, “to the upper people”). For the duration of a day or night, the shaman (Chukchi *эн'эн'ыльын/en'en'yul'yn*) “sang the motif without words, as if lulling the dead to sleep”. As the author emphasizes, “the singing was not loud, and the blows to the frame drum were not strong” (Vdovin 1981, 191–192).

Family shamanic singing (*ильуткукинэт грэным/il'utkukinet grepyt*) assumed a certain specified sequence in the performance of the songs as well as a special arrangement of the singing participants and their appearance (Vensten-Tagrina 2014). The host and hostess would begin the ritual singing with obligatory old personal songs (*чыгрэмн'эткин грэным/sygremin'etkin*

4. Tiunikova, V. N., Informant. Recorded: 2005, Nunligran settlement, Provideniya District, Chukotka.

5. Vuelë, N. A., Informant. Recorded: 2005, Nunligran settlement.

grepyt)—“family melodies that have been passed down” (Bogoraz 1937, 10)—and *ы’ттыыюльэты грэныт* (*y’tt’yiul’ety grepyt*, songs dedicated to the ancestors”) (Weinstein 2018, vol. 3, 430–432). A special role is assigned to the woman who is the guardian of the family hearth and the entire household ritual objects, including the drums. During the calendric and thanksgiving holidays of coastal Chukchi, women also play the main role during the hunting feast (Bogoraz-Tan 1926, 69-70). The performance of the songs themselves during the celebration only stops when the singer grows tired (Vdovin 1977, 130).

Songs associated with family totems are called *мральаткэн грэныт* (*mral’atken grepyt*) and refer to certain Chukchi rituals. For example, some ritual songs and incantation lyrics portray the Raven as the cult animal of a given family (Weinstein-Tagrina 2007, 264). It should be stated that the Raven and the stories about him constitute the oldest layer of folklore in Chukchi mythology. According to researcher E. M. Meletinskii, tales about the Raven—*Куркыле* (*Kurkyle*)—are concentrated in the most archaic genre of such material, the so-called “Beginning of the creation of the news”—*Тоттомгаткэн пын’ылтэ* (*Tottomgatken pyn’ylte*). “The main character in these myths is the Raven, found acting in a peculiar partnership with the Creator. He acts as the Creator of those blessings that nature gives to people, as the facilitator of life (Meletinskii 1979, 28–29). One such incantational appeal to the Raven-cum-Creator goes as follows:

*Гук’! Иук’!⁶ К’ууркылыгыт, пэнинэйгыт лейвыльыгыт,
гыныкан’к’аск’ан’ывэзгыт [...]*

Гук’! Иук’! Ворон – ты, все тот же странник, твоей земли
начало [...]

Guk’! Iuk’! Raven—you, still the same wanderer, the origin-principle
of your land [...], etc.

(Incantation N° 8, Bogoraz 1910–1913, 134)

Incantation Practice

A special dimension of traditional song culture is the practice of *incantation*. Chukchi believe in the power of magic formulas, and during calendric and thanksgiving holidays, they recite incantations—*эвъянвыт* (*ev’ianvyt*)—each of which occupies a leading position in the structure of a given festival. These incantations are verbal formulas to which a supernatural effect on the external world is attributed and enacted on the request of the person who sings them. These incantatory utterings not only reflect notions regarding the human worship of natural forces but also trace “an intimate connection

6. Chukchi exclamations.

with mythological concepts about the cosmos” (Vdovin 1976, 46). The incantations of reindeer Chukchi thus have the aim of purification and the desire to protect the herd from *кэльэт* (*kel’et*, spirits). They are typically phrased in the following manner:

*Янотлявтэпы тыгнатыркын:
К’инэвинрэтги, ан’ан’вагырга к’инэгитэги!*

“У Главного божества прошу:
Помоги, божественной силой на меня взгляни!”

“I ask the Chief Deity:
Help, gaze upon me with your divine power!”

-Or-

*Мратын’агыргэпы тыгнатыркын:
К’инэвинрэтги, ан’ан’вагырга к’инэгитэги!*

“От правой стороны Рассвета прошу:
Помоги мне, шаманским духом посмотри на меня!”

“From the righthand side of the Dawn I ask:
Help me, gaze upon me with your shamanic spirit!”

(Incantation N°38, Bogoraz 1900, 137)

In some incantation texts, the magical spell function *валёкэвъян* (*valëkev’ian*, lit. “an incantation for the ears”)⁷ is addressed directly at a sea mammal, particularly to the walrus:

*Гук! А’мын-ым, рыркат пылвынток’к’амата
нытынгымпэтк’инэт вилют, мин’кыри выргыргын рырката
ванэван ы’нвалёмгъан, кэвычычгу рырката.*

Гук! Ну, что же! Моржам железной чашей заслоняют уши,
никакой звук они не слышат, удовольствием для сна (является
крышка) моржам!

7. In the Chukchi language, vowels in the pronunciation and spelling of a word stem can be articulated in two ways: (*ан’ан’- / -эн’эн’*; *ан’ан’- / -ен’ен’*). This depends on the obligatory transition of weak unstable to strong stable vowels during word formation, inflection, and incorporation, according to the law of vowel harmony, e.g., the word *Валёкэвъян* (*Valëkev’ian*), *валёк-* (*valëk-*) comes from *вилюк* (*viliuk*) or “ears” (*вэлёлгын / velëlgyn*—an ear; *валёмык / valëmyk*—to hear); *эвъян* (*ev’ian*)—an incantation.

Guk! Well, now! The ears of the walruses are covered with an iron bowl, they do not hear any sound, a pleasure in sleeping (is the lid) for walruses!

(Incantation N°6, Bogoras 1910–1913, 130)

The name of the following incantation points to the widespread use of incantatory singing in hunting for game:

“Гыннэкэты э’йн’эвыткукин”
Имыгынник тэ’йн’эвыркын,
Имырэк’эйырычыын Ынантоттомгаттагныкэн
К’эгвэлюк тыяаркын.
Ытлэн-ым нак’ам натчык’эн,
Эмырак’эты натчык’эн, эвытрыкылык’эй.
Ынпывэлюк тэ’йн’эвыркын мырально.
К’увчыкычыын тынып’ючивын.
Гык! А’тав мынтэнмавмык!
Мраткольын нык’олентог’ан: Ынк’эн-ым ытрьэттэ’гын!
Ынк’эн-ым игыт нытип’эйн’эк’ин:
– “Кэтэм, кэтэм. О, микигыр?”
Айвэкэн вытгыр тыяаркын,
Игыткин вытгыр тынпинтык’эвыркын.
Тыпуйэкэлиркын льулк’ыл.
Гамгаваратэты,
Гамгагыннэкэты тытчыркын гэвэты.
Гамгаваратэты гэвылтэты тынгэлыркын.
Лыгэн льулк’ыл пой’акалепэраркын.

«Призыв для зверя во время охоты»
– Различного зверя призываю,
К различным видам Начала Творения.
Маленького чирка-свистуна использую,
Он, однако, прячется,
Везде прячется, не видно его.
Предка утки (чирка-свистуна) призываю проводником.
Одинокого оленя пустил по воде.
Гык! Ну что же, подготовимся!
Предок подаст голос: Это превосходно!
И вот начинает петь:
– «Так, ровно так. Кто ты?»
Вчерашний промежуток использую,
Сегодняшний промежуток показываю на поверхность.
Сажай мажу лицо себе.
Любому народу,

Любому зверю становлюсь невидимым.
И лицо мое подобием черной маски стало ...

“Summons for a beast during the hunt”:
I call upon a different beast,
To the various forms of the Principle of Creation.
I use the little whistler-teal,
He, however, is hiding,
Hiding everywhere, he is unseen.
I summon the ancestor of the duck (the whistler-teal) as a guide.
He let a lone deer into the water.
Gyk! Well now, let’s get ready!
The ancestor will lend his voice: This is excellent!
And there he begins to sing:
—“Like that, more or less like that. Who are you?”
I use the space of yesterday,
I show today’s space to the surface.
I smear my face with soot.
To any people,
To any beast I become invisible.
And my face became like a black mask ...

(Incantation N°2, Bogoras 1910–1913, 127)

Chukchi hunters also used incantatory singing while whaling. Harpooned whales were forced by hunters, with the help of incantatory singing, to swim in the desired direction, as a rule toward the coast. To do this, a harpoon line was fixed to the side of the whale with a harpoon. The tip of the rotary harpoon is pierced in such a way as not to inflict a mortal wound on the sea mammal. Having taut harpoon lines trailing from one or two of its flanks, the creature was thus “harnessed like a deer”. A certain number of *ныг-ныг* (*nyg-nyg*) or floats were attached to these lines, followed by the *ытвээт* (*y'tv'et* in Chukchi) or *baidara* (canoe in Russian), which the whale would then “lead” to the shore. According to informants, the whale swam under the influence of magic. From the location where it was harpooned (often quite a distance from the settlement or camp), the whale would drag the canoe to its destination, as if in tow. As S. Etinkau remarks, some whales did this perfectly: *к'утырык нытэн'ныпкирэтк'инэт*—“some (of the whales) brought them (the boats) right to the (village), with perfect accuracy.” It was only once the whale had pulled the hunters as far as they needed that it would be stabbed with a spear, aiming a direct hit to the heart.⁸

8. Etinkau, S., Field materials. Informant: Reindeer herder. Recorded: 2005, Nunligran settlement, Provideniya District, Chukotka.

The following incantation has a healing property, its lyrics involving an appeal made to the constellation *Чыгэйвээм* (*Sygeiveem*, the Milky Way):

*Бинкхам Гырголягты, Чыгайваамэты лыгэн э'йн'эвэ,
гивэ ынн'от:*

– Чыгэйвээм, к'ыетги, выёльо мылгыгыт.

К'оныры-ым, Эн'энэн'эн г'эйн'эвэ чама.

Илишл-ым, како!

Нэнанонмавк'эн ваамычгын.

Оравэтльан-ым пыльыльынво нын'элк'ин.

Имырьэнут нэнамалек'эн.

Тылвуйн'э нын'элк'ин.

Нак'ам уйн'э...

И прямо вверх, к Млечному Пути вот призываю, говорю так:

– Млечный Путь, приди, помощником возьму тебя.

К тому же Восточный ветер призываю.

Ну и дождь!

Углубляет (он) большую реку.

И человек течением становится.

Всё, что есть (он) смывает.

Совершенно уходит (болезнь).

И нет (её)...

And straight up, to the Milky Way, I summon, I say this:

—Milky Way, come, I'll take you on as helper.

In addition, I call upon the East Wind.

Well, and the rain too!

Deepens (he) a large river.

And the human becomes the current.

Everything that is (he) washes away.

Completely disappears (the disease).

And (it) is not there ...

(Incantation N°7, Bogoras, 1910–1913, 132–133)

According to the informants, a specially prepared ceremonial hat is put on before uttering incantation texts.⁹

9. Kytgaut (Tynetegina), E. I., Field materials. Informant: Folklore performer, from a reindeer herder family. Recorded: 2007, Mainopylgino settlement, Beringovo District, Chukotka.

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