

A.CH. ELERT

A description OF SIBERIAN PEOPLES

Gerhard Friedrich Mueller

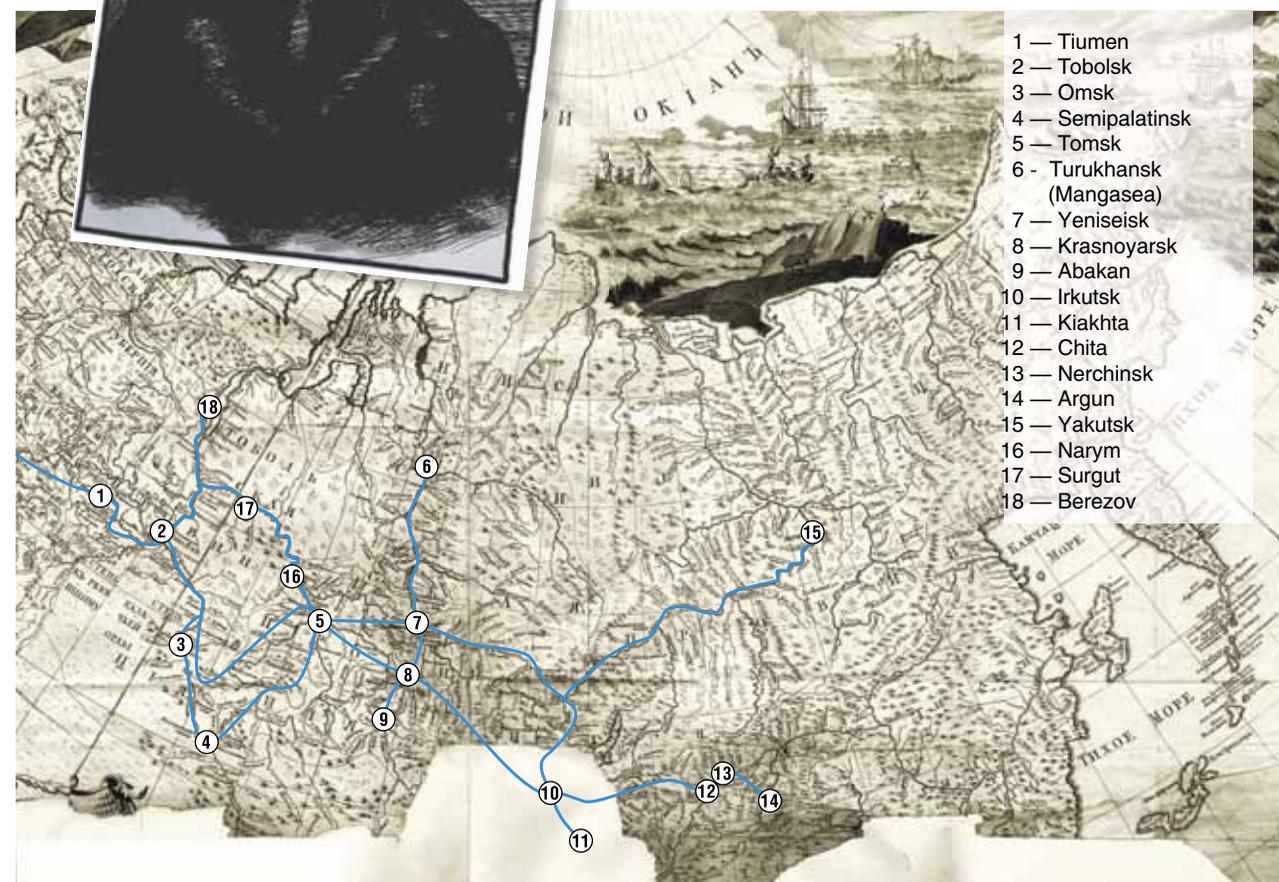
Gerhard Friedrich Mueller was an outstanding investigator of Siberia, a member of the academic detachment of the Second Kamchatka Expedition organized in 1733–1743. In the course of his decennial peregrination, he was the first among Russian researchers to carry out comprehensive comparative studies of the ethnic history, languages, social relations, material and spiritual cultures of all indigenous peoples of Siberia. Mueller's works written during the expedition and devoted to these topics are about 3,000 pages long. Modern investigators are especially interested in the data Mueller collected directly from the aborigines. Gentle manners, gifts and respectful attitude to their religion and practices helped him to make friends in all the strata of the aboriginal society: from peasants to clan grandees, and from regular shamans to learned Muslim and Buddha priests.

In the sphere of social relations of Siberian indigenous population, the problem which has received Mueller's utmost attention and detailed investigation was marriage and family. The scholar left no stone unturned, including the issues ethnographers of the later centuries preferred to avoid. In his comparative studies of marriage rituals, Mueller was interested not only in distinguishing anthropologic characteristics but also in "the posture in which a man sleeps with his wife" (quoted from the scholar's ethnography program).

Below you will find excerpts from the chapter "On marriage" from *Description of Siberian Peoples*, Mueller's two-volume full-scale work, which has not yet been translated into Russian, has never been published and became known to specialists only very recently. Even though these excerpts do not give a full picture of Mueller's views on the issues of

marriage and family of the Siberian aborigines, they bear witness to a whole range of important discoveries such as clan exogamy, which, according to Mueller, was of overall and universal nature among the pagan peoples of Siberia. He found that indigenous Siberians understood the concept of the degrees of kinship differently from Europeans. Connected to exogamy, in Mueller's opinion, was the practice of sororate, which, he believed, was spread among most Siberian peoples. Mueller also described in detail the levirate practice (or "Levites' law," in his terminology), "so surprising for us." Mueller believed that the practice of marrying

Some investigators believe that the drawing depicts Gerhard Friedrich Mueller



- 1 — Tiumen
- 2 — Tobolsk
- 3 — Omsk
- 4 — Semipalatinsk
- 5 — Tomsk
- 6 - Turukhansk (Mangasea)
- 7 — Yeniseisk
- 8 — Krasnoyarsk
- 9 — Abakan
- 10 — Irkutsk
- 11 — Kiakhhta
- 12 — Chita
- 13 — Nerchinsk
- 14 — Argun
- 15 — Yakutsk
- 16 — Narym
- 17 — Surgut
- 18 — Berezov

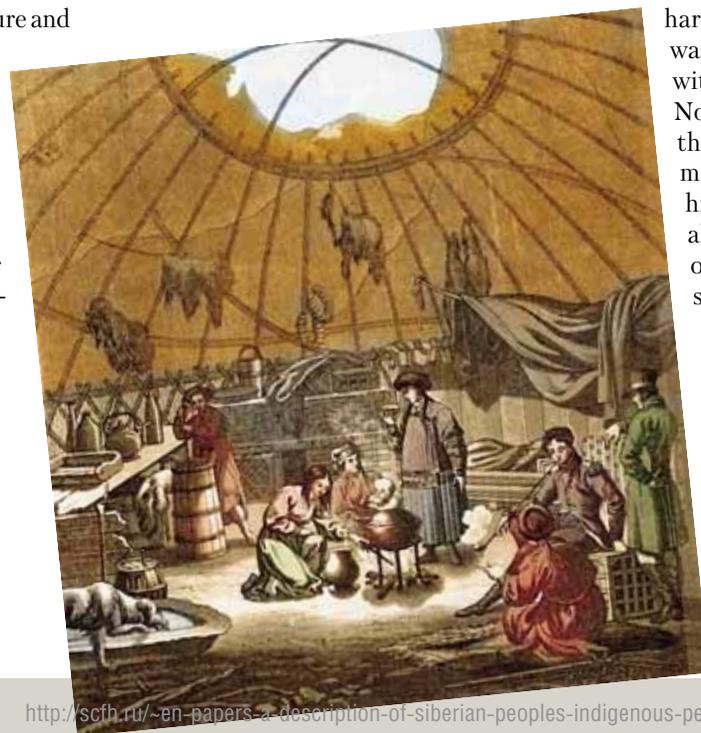
the widow to her closest relative as well as the biblical Levites' law and the Muslim rule of marrying a younger brother to the non-inheriting widow of his older brother all originated from a common source, the practice of maintaining the line, which was universal in the Far East as far back as the biblical times.

There were certain exceptions though, and Mueller described a wide variety of them. Most of the restrictions were of recommendatory nature, and the only penalty for breaking them was social disapproval and belief in the imminent punishment on behalf of extra-mundane forces. The Yakuts, for example, had stories about humpbacks and other deformities resulting from a sinful marriage.

In *Description of Siberian Peoples*, as in his other works, Mueller controverted some European "hedge writers" who, he believed, had a biased attitude towards Siberian peoples and spread all sort of fairytales about them. By those times European literature had developed a strong and long-lasting tradition of deprecating polygyny, which was an important part of putting Christian values in opposition to Muslim culture and ethics. Mueller argued vehemently against it, and one may say that his writings demonstrate both a purely masculine, unilateral approach to marriage and idealization of polygamy. On the other hand, he was far from re-



A Kachinsk Tatar woman. Georgi, I. G., *Description of All Peoples Inhabiting Russia*, St. Petersburg, 1799

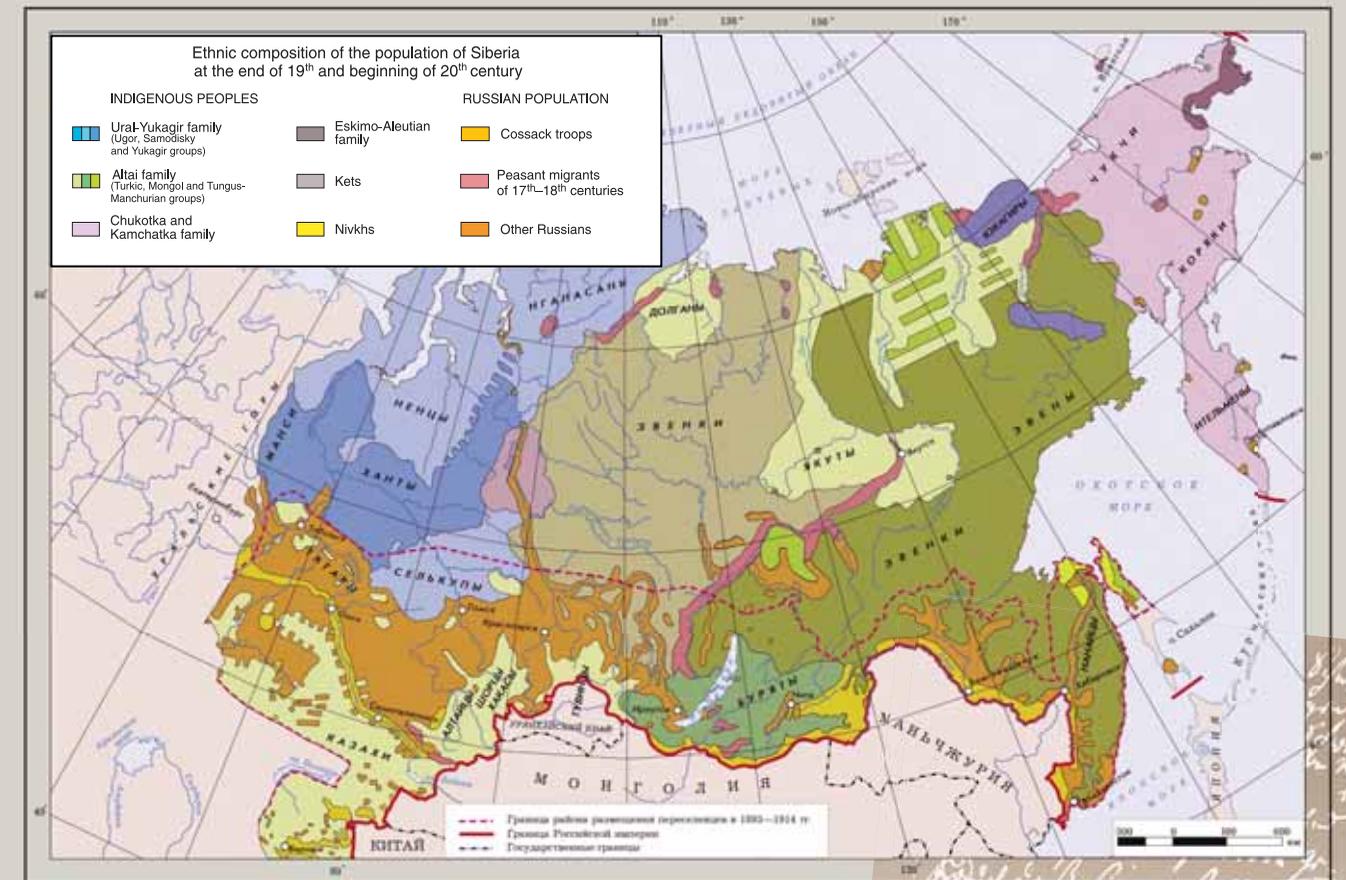


Kachinsk Tatars. 1812. Drawing by E. M. Korneev

garding the position of women in the indigenous society as idyllic.

The main conclusion Mueller made concerning family relations was the universally humiliating and sometimes slavish position of women. For example, dwelling on Buryat families, he wrote that a husband could leave his wife any time whilst she could never afford to do it, no matter how badly treated. The treatment of a wife hardly differed from that of any other belonging, "The husband can break her arms and legs, and she is not allowed to protect her rights in any way." A Buryat woman, however, at least acquired some rights after her husband died because she inherited after him. With most other peoples, the widow belonged to her husband's close relations.

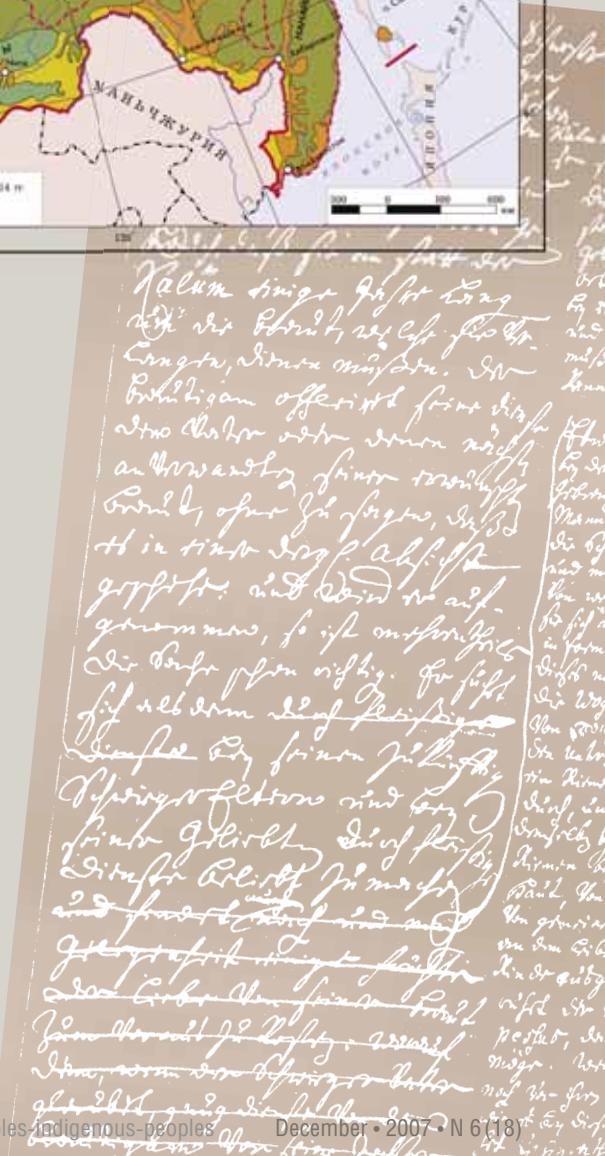
The result of treating women like goods was that a husband who was not satisfied with his wife's qualities of a housewife or who knew (or suspected) that his wife was unfaithful to him, could cancel the deal, return the wife to her parents and get back the kalym (bride price). In this case, the woman still had a chance to re-marry. However, the punishment could be much harsher, especially if the wife was unfaithful to her husband with a man outside the family. Normally, the husband could then relegate her to a slave and make her serve another wife of his. Mueller noted that virtually with all Siberian peoples only a relationship with a stranger was considered real



Autograph by G. F. Mueller Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts, c. 181, f. 1386, p II, p. 40 o.

adultery. A liaison with the husband's brothers or other close relations was frowned upon and thought to deserve a punishment, but only a mild one. Unlike other Siberian peoples, Yakuts perceived a relationship with a Russian as an unforgivable sin punishable, according to Mueller, either by relegation to a slave or by banishment from home without any means of existence.

The qualities of a future wife valued most highly were her ability to keep the house and be a good worker. Other characteristics, beauty including, were also taken into consideration but looked upon as secondary. Regretfully, Mueller was taciturn about the criteria by which women's beauty was judged. A rare exception was his comments on the epithets Yakuts attributed to a high-ranking goddess who possessed, according to Mueller's translation from the Yakut language to German, a big bosom and ample hips. "These two characteristics are, in Yakuts' opinion, the most important indicators of beauty." Love matches happened but were rare.



Handwritten text in German script, likely an autograph by G.F. Mueller, discussing various topics related to the expedition and the local population.

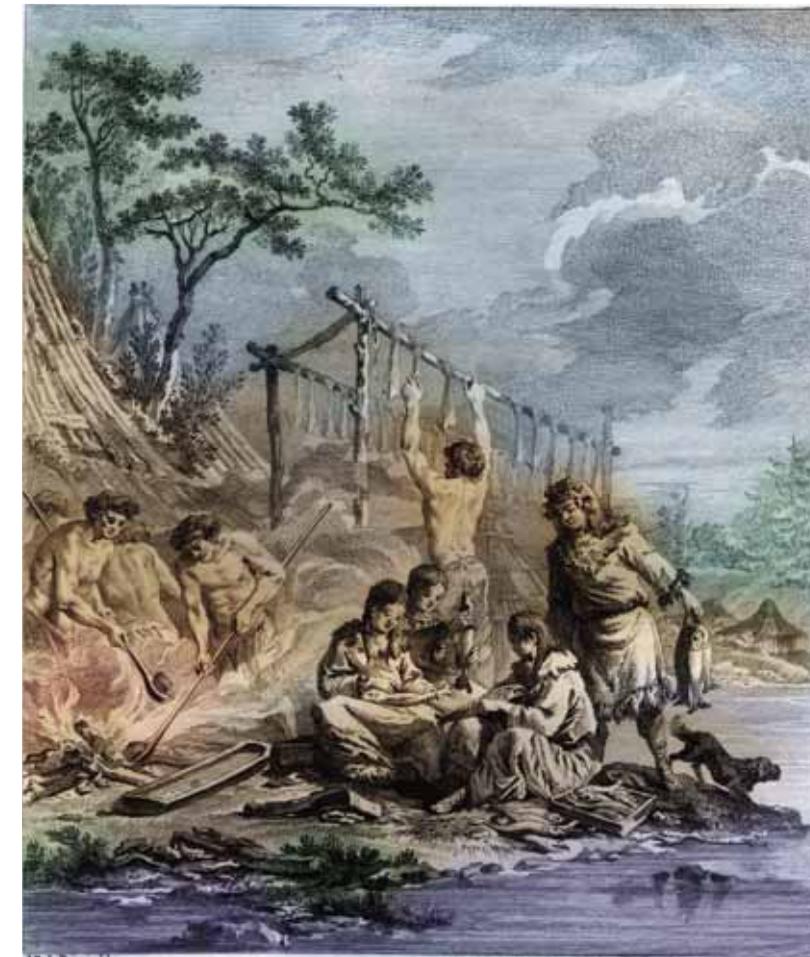
Autograph by G.F. Mueller Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts, a. 181, f. 1386, p II, p. 51o.

The texts published end with a noteworthy phrase, "If I dared to offend against decorum, I could touch on some secretive facts of marriage." This phrase is from the work Mueller was going to publish. In his diaries and rough copies, we can see a lot of materials contradicting the decorum of that age. Describing intimate relationships of various peoples, the first wedding night, the "prudency" belts, etc., he admitted sometimes that he was ashamed to write about these things but believed that he had to since this was what proper research required.

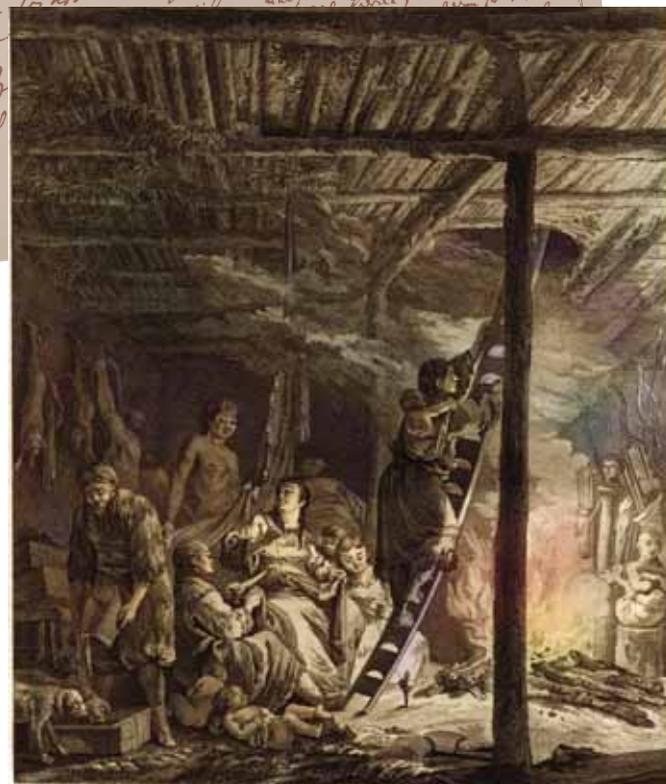
Mueller concluded that moral standards relating to sexual relationships and the concept of shame varied a lot among Siberian peoples, and were in direct dependence on the degree of civilization. The absence of shame was for Mueller an indisputable indicator of people's savagery, as it was the case with the Chukchis, who were not ashamed to appear naked in their homes in front of strangers. The scholar was even more shocked by the Chukchi custom to invite guests and Russian prisoners to have an intercourse with the host's wife or daughters; the refusal was taken as an offence and a sign of ill will.

As for other Siberian peoples, their concepts of shame and sexual behavior, especially those of Muslim Tatars, had, in Mueller's opinion, much in common with European standards. Sometimes Siberians proved to be more prudish. On the basis of the scrupulously collected data, the scholar came to the conclusion that even though some sexual perversions known to Europeans could also be observed with Siberians, they were exceptionally rare and were regarded as a cardinal sin. In this connection, Mueller told a story about the Yakuts who discovered that a Polish prisoner serving as a Cossack in the town of Yakutsk had sexual relationships with boys. This was thought of as an infamous and detestable act. The news quickly spread among the Yakuts and neighboring peoples seriously damaging the reputation of Russians: inclination towards this vice was attributed to them. Mueller believed that the absence of reasons leading to glut and debauchery accounted for fewer adulteries among Siberian peoples as compared to Europeans.

Kamchadals. Kracheninnikow S. Voyage en Siberia: La description du Kamchatka, Paris, 1768, vol.2



Handwritten text in German script, likely an autograph by G.F. Mueller, continuing the narrative or providing additional details.



Interior of a Kamchadal dwelling. 18th century drawing. Kracheninnikow S. Voyage en Siberia: La description du Kamchatka, Paris, 1768, vol.2

Autograph by G.F. Mueller Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts, a. 181, f. 1386, p II, p. 38

Handwritten text in German script, likely an autograph by G.F. Mueller, discussing various topics related to the expedition and the local population.

Indigenous Peoples of Siberia: Marriage and Family



The Golds (Nanais).
19th century lithograph

G. F. MUELLER

With virtually all peoples of Siberia, marriages are made through the intermediary of parents or, if there are no parents, of close relations replacing the parents. Thus, fathers choose brides for their sons, older brothers for younger brothers, uncles for nephews; and junior relations should always be happy with the choice of their seniors.

First and foremost, a fundamental principle common to peoples of Siberia, no matter whether they are of Mohammedan, Tangut or pagan faith, is that you can have more than one wife at the same time. Peoples of Mohammedan religion are not allowed to have more than four wives whilst with other peoples the number of wives is not limited. However, you can hardly find a family with four wives because only a very wealthy man can manage

to keep just two or three wives. By Mohammedan law the husband can only take a second or third wife with the consent of his first wife, though this rule is not always observed. The Kamashins, Taigins and some other peoples, who used to have more than one wife, cannot afford it now because of their poverty.

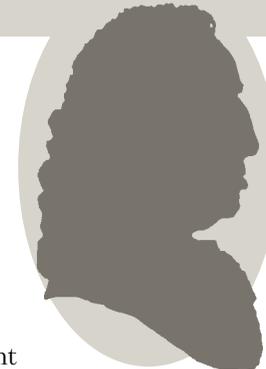
When I said that marriages are normally arranged by parents or close relatives, I only meant the first marriage. As soon as the son gets married, he is no longer under his father's authority and can use his discretion in the following marriages.

Yakut parents, especially if they are old, sometimes get their children married at a very young age. Before they have reached adulthood, the young couple live with the parents, giving them comfort and pleasure. The Yakuts seem to be the only people practicing this, though with other peoples engagements also can take place at a very young age. Sometimes it even happens that parents agree the future marriage of their unborn children. It is universally accepted, however, that puberty is the necessary condition of a valid marriage, and it is considered normal to wait for the children to become physically strong and acquire the experience needed to keep house. Skills in house work are a must for Siberian wives whereas beauty, though also valued, is less essential.

The Inbatsk Ostiaks of the Yenisei often marry five- to ten- year- old girls to boys of the same age or older. I saw a boy, aged 16, who had slept several times with his seven- year- old wife. Sometimes a young boy is married to a girl who is 15 or 20 years old.

In Siberia as well as in Asia in general, it is normal for a man to buy his bride. The bride price is called "kaly" in the Tatar language, and the same word is used in Russian.

The Mohammedan Tatars living in the Tobolsk, Tiumen and Tomsk regions agree the kaly amount in money terms but pay it in kind. The Ostiaks follow the same practice. Because of their poverty, their kaly rarely exceeds five to ten rubles whereas the Tatars mentioned above can pay from thirty to fifty rubles for a highborn bride. Since they were baptized,

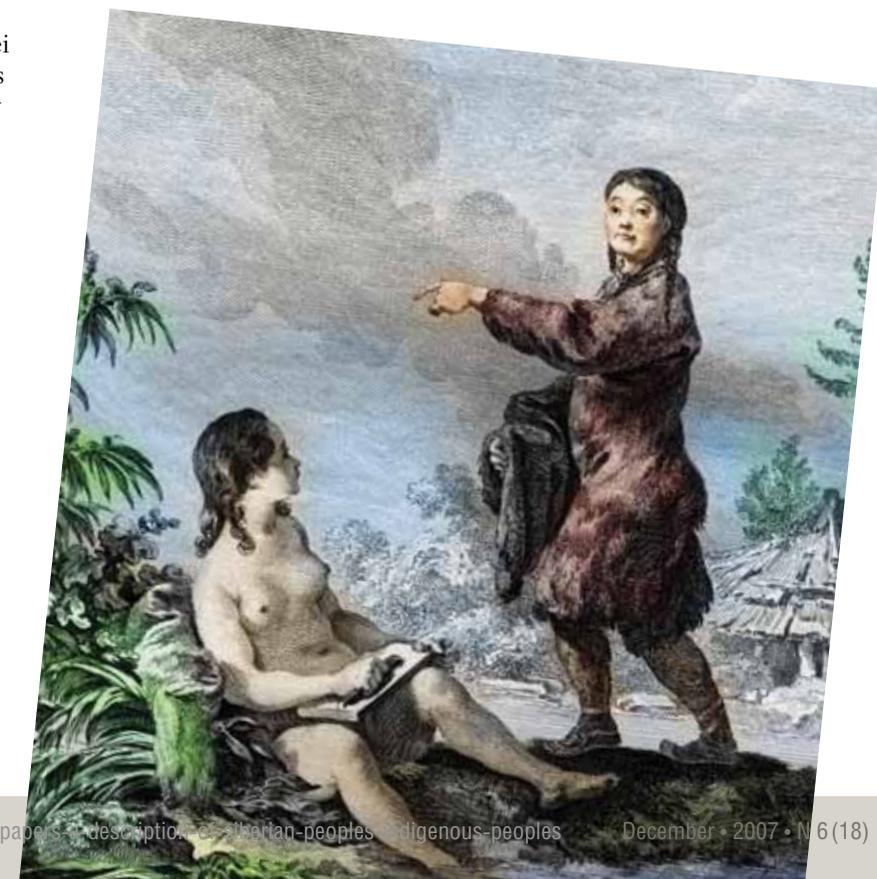


the Yenisei Ostiaks have been paying a very small kaly in the form of cotton clothes or calico for shirts given to the bride's parents. The Forest Tungus pay the kaly in deer: from ten to twenty deer for a bride. The Samoyedes, Yukaghirs, Koryaks and Chukchis also pay in deer, and the richer a people is in deer, the higher the price.

Tatars get married both with and without the kaly (*Chalyng*)*. In the latter case the husband, if not satisfied with his wife, cannot sell her. She can go back to her relatives taking her dowry, but the children are left behind with the husband. The highest kaly amounts to thirty head, half of them horses and the other half, corned cattle. The bride's dowry (*Entschi*) can make up half of the kaly, less or more than that depending on her father's wealth, number of children and love for his daughter.

**Italicized are the words of the Siberian languages transcribed in Latin by G. F. Mueller.*

Chukotka women. Kracheninnikow S.
Voyage en Sibirie: La description du Kamtchatka.
Paris, 1768. vol. 2



If a father pays the kalym instead of the son, he is considered to have paid in full his due for the son to settle down to married life. A bride should bring everything necessary for the new household if her parents can afford it and have been paid a high kalym for her. She also can be given various cattle and deer depending on the wealth and situation of the people she belongs to.

The bride's dowry usually makes up half of the kalym, though sometimes, if the father loves his daughter very much or has no son he has to take care of, the dowry can cost as much as

the kalym or even more. Hardly ever can a bride have no dowry at all. If it happens, it means that her family is either exceptionally poor or extremely greedy.

It is universal practice that the amount and the kind of dowry are not specified. Every father can give his daughter as much as he feels like, no matter how big the kalym was. Since marrying off a daughter is treated as a bargain, the bride is considered a proper compensation for the kalym. Poor people, therefore, are more happy to have a lot of daughters rather than a lot of sons because daughters can earn

them an income whilst sons, on the contrary, can put them to expenses if parents wish to have them married.

The kalym, however, does not have to be paid in kind. Two families having both sons and daughters and wishing to get their children married can agree an exchange of brides without getting any payment for them. For example, a father marries off his daughter to a brother of his son's bride or a brother marries off his sister and marries in return a sister of his new brother-in-law. This kind of kalym is especially popular with the Tungus.

The Kamchadals and the Kurils have the practice of serving a few years for the bride they desire. The fiancé offers his services to the father or close relatives of the girl he wishes to marry without revealing his intentions. If his offer is accepted, it usually means that the bargain is reached, and the young man does his best to win the affection of his future parents-in-law and the girl.

The kalym has managed to live through baptism: Siberians who left paganism for Christianity continue to buy brides for a set price. This is true of all the Ostiak peoples inhabiting the basins of the Irtysh, Ob, Ket and Yenisei rivers; the Voguls; and the Chulyum Tatars. The clergy allow them to preserve these non-Christian rites because they understand that even if they insisted on breaking this practice, it would be very difficult to persuade Siberians to do it as they believe it is unfair that the father who has supported his daughter till adulthood will get no compensation for her when she leaves his clan for good, and he will not be entitled to get either her services or attention in the future.

When I say that the bride changes over to another clan and the father can no longer expect any services or attention from her, I mean that this is the opinion shared by all Siberian peoples, whose society is made up of clans and only members of the same clan are considered relatives. All men take brides belonging to other

clans; and as soon as a girl joins her husband's clan, her kinship with her parents' clan breaks. From this point in time, nothing connects her to her former blood relations.

They are so meticulous about it that they will never take a wife from their own clan, no matter how numerous it is. The clan may include 300 to 400 families and be spread over thousands of miles, and no member of it may remember having heard of the kind of kinship existing between the young peoples; all these things do not matter. A clan's common name is much more important than proximity of blood.

This belief underlies their doctrine of prohibited degrees, which makes marriage impossible. If the bride belongs to another clan, the marriage can go ahead even if she appears to be closely related to her fiancé because of her former marriages. For example, the girl can be a sister of her fiancé's mother or the young couple can be children of sisters or brothers, or the fiancé can be a brother of the girl's mother. Two brothers can marry two sisters; one can even marry two sisters, both simultaneously and one after the other. A father and a son can marry two sisters; or a father marries a mother, and the son marries her daughter.

This practice, so controversial to our customs, seems amazing to us. When I first heard about it, I also found it very strange and, therefore, tried to inquire everywhere about it. The conclusion is that this practice is universal, with the exception of the peoples of the Mohammedan religion and those who have adopted Christianity; these follow their own dogmas and take into account the prohibited degrees established by their religions.

Another practice concerning degrees, not less surprising to us, is that a widow, in her second marriage, normally marries her closest relative. It is very possible that this practice and Levites' law, according to which the younger brother should take the childless widow of his older brother in

order to keep the semen, have the same source, originating from the practice common in the East in those times.

A basic pagan rule has it that a widow obeys blindly the closest relatives of her deceased husband, who inherit after him. The widow does not inherit after her husband; on the contrary, she is part of the inheritance because she became the property of the clan when the kalym was paid. Her relatives can re-marry her to somebody out of their clan and, once again, get the kalym for her, which is quite common, especially

if she does not have a fine reputation and is not believed to be a good housewife. If, on the contrary, she is well liked and is a house-proud woman, she will normally stay with her clan, with the closest relative becoming the principal heir and successor to bed.

These peoples are wrongfully accused of abominable incest. They believe that death breaks kinship; hence a widow should be regarded as belonging, again, to her former clan. The kalym once paid for her encourages her husband's relatives to keep

A Kamchadal woman in smart clothes.
Drawing of the second half of 18th century.
Georgi, I. G. *Description of all the Peoples Inhabiting Russia*.
St. Petersburg, 1799



A Kamchadal. *Kracheninnikow S. Voyage en Sibirie: La description du Kamtchatka*. Paris, 1768, vol. 2

her, in the same way as nobody will leave or sell a plot of fertile land he has bought and intends to use. A stepmother normally goes to the oldest stepson but if he knows that she has been on intimate terms with a younger brother and this is not likely to stop in the future, he will give her to the brother.

Another comment I can make about the kalym is that it is normally lower for a widow than for a girl. The lost bloom of youth, older age and prejudice (they believe that a widow brings misfortune) are the reasons for this. In the same way, a loving father is unwilling to marry off his daughter to a widower because he is afraid that she might die, like his former wives did. If he, nevertheless, decides to give his daughter to a widower, he will demand a higher kalym or give his daughter a smaller dowry to compensate, at least in part, the future misfortune. With some peoples, Tatars particularly, a widower very often has to elope the bride first and then agree the kalym with his father-in-law.

The bride also can be eloped if the bridegroom or his parents and close relatives are not rich enough to pay the entire kalym at once, or if the bride is not happy with her parents' choice and has a secret relationship with another man with whom she agrees the elopement. In either case, the beloved bridegroom, together with his friends and relatives, should be on guard, ready to deal with a possible attack: the bride's relatives or the lawful bridegroom and his companions



Остяцкіе типы.

The Ostyak types. Finsch O. *Travel to West Siberia, Moscow, 1882*

Undinski Ostrog (*settlement*) once brought me his daughter, who had been engaged for some time, because I wanted to see the difference in the clothes married and unmarried women wear. When I noticed that she was drawing close to the end of her pregnancy, he said that it was considered normal to have children before marriage if the girl had been engaged properly.

A marriage can be cancelled before it has been properly contracted if the fiancé or his parents happen to quarrel

may try to fight back the capture from him. The scrambles may be violent; somebody can even be killed, especially with the Tungus, who attack each other with bows and arrows, whilst other Siberians normally use sticks as a weapon. The one who wins in these skirmishes gets the bride, but the kalym is to be paid anyway even if it happens years after the marriage has taken place.

Until the entire kalym has been paid, the father keeps his daughter and uses her services in the household. In no way should she obey her fiancé or render him any services. As soon as the kalym begins to be paid, however, the fiancé is usually allowed to pay visits to the girl, and even prove his love for her at night. Right after the engagement, Mohammedan Tatars curtain off, on their wide plankbed, a sleeping place for the girl where her fiancé can join her after her parents have gone to bed and he purportedly got into the house by stealth.

A Buryat chief in the

A Kamchadal woman. 18th century drawing.
Kracheninnikow S. *Voyage en Siberia: La description du Kamtchatka.* Paris, 1768, vol. 2



with the girl's parents, or the girl turns out to be inappropriate for her fiancé, or she allows to be eloped because she is not happy with her fiancé. Further developments depend on whether there are children born out of wedlock and also on the amount of the kalym paid. If it is the fiancé and his parents who do not wish the marriage to take place, the part of the kalym paid is not returned, and the girl's father keeps the children born out of wedlock.

However, the fiancé will hardly ever initiate the break because he can gain his ends by arts, and at a profit. He then makes believe that he desires the girl but is not able to pay the remaining part of the kalym. In the meanwhile, he takes another wife; and when the first father-in-law sees, a few years later, that the marriage is a no go and his daughter has no husband while the girl discovers with chagrin that her fiancé has preferred another woman, their dissatisfaction turns into revenge: if there is another wooer, the girl gets married to him. As this is exactly what the first fiancé has been waiting for, he goes to his first father-in-law accusing him of breaking the arrangement and claiming back the kalym. In this case, as in the case of the girl and her parents objecting to the marriage, he should get back both the kalym and the children, if any. However, Mongols, Kalmycks, Yakuts, Bratsky and Forest peoples have the rule that if the kalym was paid in deer, camels, horses, horned cattle or sheep, and the animals bred, the get remains with the bride's father. Neither does he have to return the cattle which were part of the kalym but died, were stolen, or some other misfortune happened to them. This may lead to violent quarrels and long-standing lawsuits when the bride's father is accused of falsely asserting that many heads of the kalym cattle died or were stolen. His evidence is then checked with the help of witnesses.

Sometimes the marriage arrangement breaks without any quarrels and with mutual consent of the parents from both sides. In this case the fiancé gets back the kalym, and the bride's father keeps the best horse, or the best camel, or the best ox, or, with Forest peoples, the best deer as comfort.

If the kalym has been paid in full and both parties insist on the marriage, the wedding day is agreed upon. In the Mohammedan religion practiced by the Tobolsk, Tiumen, Tarsk and Tomsk Tatars, the clergy take part in the wedding ceremony. The bride and the bridegroom must confirm the desire to get married of their own free will in front of the clergy, then the clergyman of the highest standing within the community instructs the bridegroom in the code of married life and, finally, gives his blessing.

Since the Mohammedan religion distinguishes between clergymen of different dignity, it depends on the bridegroom and local circumstances the clergyman of what rank officiates the marriage ceremony. Highborn people invite an akhun if they can find one in the neighborhood; people of the medium estate, a mullah; and commons are content with an abyz.



Yakuts

A Yakut woman. Georgi, I. G., Description of All Peoples Inhabiting Russia, St. Petersburg, 1799



86

A Yakut woman. Drawing of the second half of 19th century. The Peoples of Siberia: Album of Paintings, St. Petersburg, 1880



Бурятская баба впереди.
Une Bachiata en avant.
Femme Bachioute par devant.

A Buryat girl. Drawing by E. M. Korneev



87

I was present at the wedding ceremony held on March 15, 1734, in the Sabanak aul, a Tatar village located on the Irtysh, 14 miles upstream from Tobolsk. The bride came from that village, and the bridegroom was from Tiumen. When we arrived, as directed, at about 9 o'clock in the morning, the merrymaking was in full swing.

There were two houses in the yard: one was occupied by the bride, all the women invited to the wedding and all her relations; the other housed the bridegroom, his relations and the guests he invited. Such a separation takes place only if the bridegroom has no home of his own in the same settlement. If he and his bride live in the same town or settlement, he will stay in his home together with his guests until the wedding ceremony begins, as will be described below.

Each company, the bride's and the bridegroom's, had its own music: pipes and fiddle violins, accompanied by even fouler singing. On top of that, in the yard they beat a special kind of small kettle-drums described in the chapter on music. Bad as it was, music attracted a lot of listeners; and it was quite crowded.

All Tatar feast-days include horserace contests, with prizes awarded to the winners. For this event thirty to forty racehorses were selected, the best in Tobolsk; small boys were riding them. They all began the race at the same time, at 10a.m., from the bank of the Irtysh river close to the Tatar slododa (a settlement on the outskirts of a town), which is where the river Kurdiumka falls into the Irtysh, right at the foot of the mountain. The first riders arrived at the Sabanak aul at 11a.m. We as well as other guests had been reminded about this entertainment, so everybody was waiting in the yard, where prizes were put in two rows, one on the bride's side and the other on the bridegroom's. Prizes on the bridegroom's side were a length of red Chinese silk, a fox pelt, a length of green fabric *Cham*, a length of *Tschaldar* fabric, and a red curried horse hide.

Prizes on the bride's side were a length of purple Chinese silk, a length of red-and-white striped *Darei* fabric, an otter pelt, a length of red Chinese silk, and a red curried horse hide. All ten prizes were hung on the poles put vertically in the ground. As the riders arrived, the specially nominated judges handed out the prizes from the two rows, starting with the more valuable. The first three boys, who came almost simultaneously, got two lengths of the Chinese fabric and a length of *Darei*. A long time later, another three boys arrived, who were given the otter pelt, the red Chinese silk and the fox pelt; the boys who rode in after them got the green *Cham*, the *Tschaldar* and the red horse hides. All the other got nothing at all, they were laughed at and shamed by clapping hands and whistling. Some of the boys, or the riders, were Tatars and some were Russians. Despite the cold day, they were all dressed very lightly (had large linen trousers on) but got very warm after the quick gallop. When the prizes were being handed out, I could sometimes hear lashing and complaints that the judges were biased. When this entertainment was over, the wedding ceremony began, and this is how it went.

Now the bridegroom and his guests were to be taken to the bride's house for the marriage. To this end he was accompanied by two matchmakers, walking to the right and to the left of him, and sometimes in front of him, with the crowd of guests following them. They went round the yard three times, not far from the fence, and each time they walked past the window of the room where the bride was. When they did it for the first time, a great many bits of silk and cotton were thrown to them from the window; the people jostled to pick them up.

In the meanwhile the clergy, an akhun and two abyzes, together with the bride's relations, were in a special room in the bride's house. They were sitting on wide benches along the walls, with akhun in the most honorable corner and the abyzes on both sides of him, and the other guests according to their standing. Those for whom there was not enough room along the walls were sitting in the front, in the second and third rows.

As soon as the bridegroom completed his march around the yard, he was taken to the bride's house. Before going to the wedding room, however, he had to wait in the entry room for his matchmakers to get the akhun's permission to proceed with the ceremony. After the bridegroom entered the wedding room, the matchmakers again announced their suit, publicly and formally. As the bride was at that time in another, women's room, the akhun sent for her consent, which was soon received. After that, he briefly instructed the bridegroom to live with his future wife in peace and love and not to re-marry without her permission. The bridegroom looked perplexed or ashamed. The akhun asked the bridegroom whether he promised to fulfil these matrimonial obligations, but he didn't utter a word. He was looking down, and the matchmakers made the promise for

him. Then the akhun gave his blessing to the bridegroom and the absent bride and wished them happiness, but made such a face that did not look reverent at all. He gave a laugh, and the guests laughed together with him.

I do not know what was happening in the bride's room at that time. As far as I know, neither the bride nor any other woman is ever present at a Mohammedan Tatar wedding ceremony. The Tatars follow the example of other oriental peoples like Turks and Persians, with whom they share the religion, but I believe they do it out of affectation because in regular housekeeping their women are not as sensitive as not to allow strange men to see them.

As soon as the wedding ceremony was over, a few sugar-loaves were hacked, probably to symbolize the nice things about married life, and presented first to the clergy and then to all the guests. Everybody began eating their loaves. I saw that the loaves presented to the clergymen differed significantly in size from those given to other guests.

After that the bridegroom and all the guests invited to the wedding went to another room, where a great many palatable dishes were laid on wide benches. The feast lasted

late into the night, when the bride and the bridegroom were taken to bed. We did not stay long and went back to Tobolsk in the afternoon. They told us later that the feast continued the next day and the day after the next, after which the young husband went back to Tiumen together with his young wife and the rich dowry.

All Siberian peoples attach great importance to the signs of virginity shown during the first carnal knowledge. They do not accept any excuses of either physical or medical nature and believe that, at the slightest suspicion, they have the right to force a bride or young wife to confess to whom she gave the first joys of love. The husband will then demand satisfaction from the culprit, as described in the chapter on justice.

The peoples who have slaves are reputed to use enslaved women as concubines, which often stirs up rows or even fights between husband and wife. The peoples having no slaves are clear of this accusation. Wild Chukchis and Koryaks, who are always at war with their neighbors and often capture slaves, do not make any difference between enslaved women and wives bought lawfully. They live with both, and it does not concern them whether they have acquired title to these women by war or by peace.

When Russian detachments from the Anadyr Ostrog (*settlement*) fought the pagans mentioned above, they took many prisoners, including Chukotka and Koryak women slaves. If the soldiers were timid about intimate relationships, the women insisted on

having them. I heard that at the time of Captain Pavlutsky's march in 1730, when many Chukotka women were taken as slaves and a decree was issued prohibiting concubinage, the women and girls were so indignant that they were throwing dirt at the Russian soldiers and Cossacks mocking their male qualities and accusing them of not being able to pay their addresses to ladies.

Local inhabitants know by their long experience that if the desires of slave women of these nationalities are not satisfied, they will search for any opportunity to run away or, failing that, will not be faithful and zealous servants. By contrast, if the master cohabits with a slave woman, she regards herself as his wife and takes all his interests to heart. They say that the same is true of the slave women from Kamchatka.

Siberian peoples in general do not make much difference between women slaves and wives. The husband is the master, and the wife is a servant. It is only sometimes that tenderness in the relationship of a wedded couple sweetens the wife's slave position. Russians living in Kamchatka, who because of the lack of Russian women married slaves of local nationalities, have very well grasped the idea and do not give the local women more freedom than that they would have if they married their countrymen. A wife should keep the house on her own, dress and undress her husband, wait on table, and so on. It is unheard-of that the husband should give his wife a hand or let her sit by his side at table.

Oriental people usually mock at us, Europeans, when they hear about our gallantry towards women, thinking that in this way we oppose the decree of nature.

Because of the women's submissive condition, family quarrels are very few except for the discords caused by jealousy. This feeling is very important for them, and they cannot restrain themselves. Women do not normally disobey and contradict men as they

cannot appreciate yet the powers given to them by nature, which, in the civilized world, quickly gained them freedom. However, women have other faults which can be a nuisance for men and poison the pleasantness of a marriage, or even destroy it completely.

Here belongs licentiousness, which is not easy for wives to put up with, and for men, even more so. This vice is not widespread with Siberians since many of the reasons for satiation and debauchery are absent. Nevertheless, human nature is not perfect and sometimes obeys its dark sides.

What happened before the marriage, namely, that a fiancé or young husband finds no signs of virginity with his girl or wife is not looked upon as licentiousness and is of interest only because this dishonor must be paid for. Unlike other Siberian peoples, the Forest Tungus, who are a bit more prudish, can stop loving a wife because of this or can let her go, but it happens very rarely.

If a husband notices a forbidden relationship between his wife and his sons of the first marriage or between his wife and his younger brothers (the Kamasincy do not sin with a step-mother but with an older brother's wife), which can rarely remain a secret, he will not take it so close to heart as to go to extremes because of it. Siberians believe that it can be counted as friendship, the more so that when the father dies, the stepmother will go to the stepson, or the sister-in-law will go to her husband's younger brother. Nevertheless, a husband will not normally leave the culprits unpunished lest they should go down a slippery slope. Real adultery is when the offender is an alien, not a close relation. In this case, he has to pay the offended husband for the disgrace to avoid rows and fights. The wife is punished; if she gets caught again and the husband does not believe he will ever be able to direct her towards the right way, he no longer regards her as his wife and can either return her to his father-in-law in exchange for the kalym, or sell her, or, if he has other wives, make her a slave serving his favorite wife, or re-marry and make her serve his new wife to wash away the sin.



A Kamchadal. *Kracheninnikow S. Voyage en Sibirie: La description du Kamtchatka, Paris, 1768, vol.2*

Another evil which can occur in marriages and which is considered as bad as the one described above is the wife's failure, either because of laziness or lack of skills, to keep the house (her inefficiency in handiwork, or squandering her husband's property so that he cannot trust her anything or expect any good service from her). This defect, the same as licentiousness, gives a good reason to cancel the marriage; and the wife can be dealt with similarly.

Sterility also can be a reason why the husband does not appreciate his wife well enough, as every person, following the call of nature, aspires to have progeny. However, if the wife, despite this misfortune, shows good sense and behaves herself and the husband understands that a person might have some flaws which he cannot correct or lessen, he can put up with the situation, and, if he is well-to-do, try to remedy it by taking another wife, without denying love and bed to his first wife.

Writers arguing against polygyny depict it as a source of bitter family quarrels, jealousy and misunderstanding. However, if we look at the peoples having polygamous families, we will see exactly the opposite, which stems from their regulations and the observance of the order.

For example, Mohammedan Tatars, whom law forbids to take a second, third or fourth wife without the consent of the first wife, have a strict subordination: the first, or senior wife, is the housekeeper and mistress of all the other wives, who should obey her and treat her with respect. It does not mean that the husband cannot prefer a younger wife, who should neither neglect it nor act superior to others. This is the main rule of a happy marriage which the husband teaches his wives.

This practice shows that Siberians, in contrast to what one may expect from uncivilized nations, are very sensible. Contrary to our assumptions, they prove that divided love can be complete. A husband having three or four wives does not love any of them differently from the man having only one wife. And each wife is happy with the part of love her

A shaman woman in Krasnoyarsk. *Georgi, I. G., Description of All Peoples Inhabiting Russia, St. Petersburg, 1799*



*Шаманка Красноярская из музея
Une Krasnoyarskische Schamanka richuweit
the Shamanie - Dormiroie de Krasnoyarsk par dernier.*



The Kamchadals getting a fire. 18th century drawing. *Kracheninnikow S. Voyage en Sibirie: La description du Kamtchatka. Paris, 1768, vol.2*

The latter practice must have been introduced to prevent any unpleasantness and rows among the wives. Another reason for it is that the wives whose parents and relations have given them more cattle as a dowry and as presents are not willing to share their property with the less well-to-do. This is why each wife has, in the first place, the cattle she has brought with her; and if the husband has any of his property left after he has paid the kalym, he divides it equally between all the wives.

When we were in Mangasea, I noticed that some of the Samoyedes were wearing their hair plaited on both sides of the face, the way their wives did. The explanation I received was as follows: if a Samoyede satisfies his wife or sleeps with one of his wives more often than with the others, she plaits his hair in this manner and, on top of that, covers his head with fish oil or deer grease, as a sign of gratitude.

The man divides equally all the game he has caught during the day between his wives. If a wife has a greater number of children or servants, she will get a larger portion. As the husband goes from one wife to another and spends the night with each in turn, the wives take turns at feeding him at a certain time. The Forest Tungus, who move

from one place to another for hunting and take their wives with them, have the following practice. If a husband has two wives and he, for instance, spends the night with the senior, he will dine with the junior wife the following day, supper with the senior and then, again, visit the junior to spend the night with her. Each wife does her best to feed him; and since he should have a light meal before going to bed with the wife he stays the night with, he will never eat fully with the first lest he should make the second one jealous (the women are very pernickety about it).

The peoples engaged in cattle breeding like Mongols, Buryats and Yakuts, whose wives sometimes live at a day's travel distance from each other, arrange their family life in the following way: the husband, having just left the bed of one wife and breakfasted, sets out to visit the other. If the travel is so long that he will not make it to his second wife by dinner time, he only takes a light snack to appease his hunger since the second wife, knowing the time of his arrival, will be waiting for him with dinner ready. He will then stay with her till morning.

Everything that has been said implies that a man has no other occupations but to cater for his wives and supervise their domesticities. If a husband wishes to pay a visit to his friends or goes hunting or has some other business to attend to, he adapts his marital duties to these occupations. However, he has to say good-bye to each of the wives before he goes and will renew his visits in the same order upon his return.

If I dared to offend against decorum, I could touch on some secretive facts of marriage.

RSAAA*, a. 181, f. 1386, part II, pp. 37 – 51, o., 63 – 70

* The Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts
(a. – archive, f. – file, o. – overleaf, pp. – pages)



The Ostyaks. 19th century lithograph