

The *Noajdie* and his Ecstasy—A Contribution to the Discussion

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It is obvious that the trance state of the *noajdie* (the Saami shaman) and his supposed abilities to discover hidden and unknown things have fascinated the neighbours of the Saamis ever since the first contacts were established. The view of the Saamis as *the* wizards (*trollkarlar*) has been dominant in the history of the Saamis from time immemorial right up to the present day, a history that has been written for example by the Scandinavians. From the Viking sagas (Strömbäck 1935, 184, for example), we know that a *noajdie* had an aura of sorcery, and that the "Finns", meaning the Saamis¹ were in general looked upon as skilled in the arts of magic. In the historical sources, as well as in the archives, there are also documents from the time of the colonization of the Saami area, in which amazement at, and dread of, Saami sorcery is profoundly expressed by the intruders.

During the course of history, there developed tales varying in content about the strange culture of the Saamis, and it is evident that their concepts of belief were very difficult to understand and thus repulsive (Campbell 1954 and Tillhagen 1969 for example).² In these tales, the *noajdie* appears as a very frightening man, and he himself willingly adds fuel to this fear, as he feels the power he possesses to terrify individuals.

From their own traditional beliefs (Lid 1950), the Scandinavians (cited here as an example) saw the behaviour of the *noajdie* merely as general "trolldom" (sorcery), in which different elements were included, such as *hamnskifte* (changing of shape), sending of *gand* (magic projectiles), singing of *galdrar* (magic spells), and predicting the future etc., all elements famil-

¹ There has been discussion as to whether "Finne" in the Saga literature really describes an ethnic grouping or whether it serves to denote the "mountain-inhabitants" and "finders" (*finnare*) in general, i.e. a people of undefined genesis who found their livelihood in the mountain-regions, an area which was looked upon as a very inhospitable place by the people living in the plains

(Koht 1923, 161 and Kvålen 1925, 44). According to Collinder "Finne" in historical accounts means "Saami" (Collinder 1953). "Finne" in the Norwegian language today means "Saami".

² See also Bäckman 1978 where another theme of "ethnocentric legends" is discussed.

iar to the Scandinavians, which is partly proved by the vocabulary in the sources. But sorcery, at least the "black kind", was a negative factor in the community (the early medieval Church condemned it very strongly), and the Scandinavians externalized their own beliefs on to the Saamis and accused them of being masters of the magic arts.

Concerning the Saamis themselves, the *noajdie* was regarded as *the* soothsayer and diviner, but above all he was associated with what was looked upon as *passé*, (*bissie* in Southern Saamian), the sphere of the spirits and the gods, the *sacred* one might say. He was the true mediator between man and the supernatural powers on which man was dependent. Like his colleague in Siberia, the *noajdie* was the talented one, who learned and taught the mythological traditions and functioned as the "mytho-poet", that is he renewed the religious traditions by means of his poetic talents. He was an ordinary member of his group, but when needed, he acted on behalf of his groupmembers. By means of his knowledge and by the technique he had acquired—thanks to a long apprenticeship—he was able to fall into a trance and of his own volition direct his "free-soul" wherever it was necessary—to the *passeworld*, or elsewhere. He was a *guovdi ilmme vázzi*, a wanderer in two worlds,³ and thus he lived up to the expectations of the members of his own community and fulfilled the religious tradition.

In Saami popular tradition, the memory of the *noajdie* and his extraordinary skill is still alive, but he has lost his religious function and become a diviner or a wizard, or a juggler, almost in accordance with the view of the Scandinavians. There are numerous tales of his fantastic abilities as a wizard, told by the Saamis as well by their neighbours. The tales vary, however, depending on the cultural milieu where they develop; in non-Saami popular belief, the *free-soul* or *alter ego* of the *noajdie* is often said to materialize in front of the onlooker and is then able to perform real deeds while the *noajdie* himself is lying in a trance far away. Arbman has given a true instance of such an event (Arbman 1955, 49–52): a judge and his driver were caught in a snow-drift with their sledge, but they were helped by an old »spålapp» (Saami-wiseman) who turned up and thereafter immediately disappeared without saying a word. On reaching their destination, the two men, to their astonishment, met the old Lapp again. The explanation was that the old man concerned had entered into a trance and sent away his "free-soul/alter ego" to find out the reason for the delay of the judge and his companion.

Another motif in the tales of "spålappar" in Nordic tradition is that the

³ From Professor Israel Ruong.

noajdie is able to demonstrate his spiritual visit to a far distant place by means of an object which is wellknown to his client. Or, furthermore, his "visit" is certified later on by a trustworthy person who had seen his materialized "alter ego" at the place concerned. Let us return to Arbman again: a Norwegian soldier on a mission in Denmark was anxious to know of his wife's safe delivery of a child. "With the help of the bottle" an old Lapp "sitting by the tiled-stove" was induced to find out what had happened to the soldier's wife and the expected child. The Lapp sat down as if lost in thought. His head soon dropped down and after a while he seemed to be "stone-dead". He woke up, however, after an hour, saying that everything was in order at home. As proof of his "visit" to the soldier's home in Norway, he took out two silver-spoons that belonged to the soldier's family (Arbman 1955, 54–55).

The following is a variant of the motif: A Lapp, Lördal by name, offered to prove his "magic art" to the Archbishop of Uppsala who was visiting his home in Lappland. Lördal burnt some herbaceous plants, inhaled the smoke and seemed to "pass away". After an hour he woke up and told the Archbishop that his wife was working in the kitchen, and he gave a detailed and exact description of the room. As evidence of his "visit" to Uppsala, he said that he had hidden the wife's wedding-ring in the coal-box. The Archbishop's wife confirmed his "visit" in a letter later on and the ring was found in the coal-box, as the man had said (Arbman 1955, 52–54).

In Saami folk tradition one can seldom, if ever, find such motifs as those mentioned above. There are a great many tales of the *noajdie* and his ability to perform fantastic acts, such as knowing about conditions in other places, but it is never said that his "alter ego" could turn up in distant places far away from his body in a trance. It is also seldom or never said that he had to prove his "visit" with an object of some kind; one saw and heard the result of his "journey" and took it for granted. Instead, it is stated that a *noajdie* has "capabilities" beyond the intellect of ordinary human beings and that this is due to help from supernatural "powers". These "powers" are incomprehensible but real; they are the "givers of knowledge and skills", and once they have chosen their man, he has to obey.

As an example of Saami tradition regarding a *noajdie*'s powerful skill and its results, we will cite a tale from Swedish Southern Lapland. It was related at the beginning of the 20th century by an old Saami who had memorized an episode from his childhood. We will repeat only the substance of his account here and leave aside the details: Madter-Trorie, a respected *noajdie*, was once able to drive home a herd of reindeer-cows and calves from a distance by manipulating his drum while singing a *jojk*. Unfortunately, the narrator, who was then just a little boy, was unable to

understand the words of the song. After some initial preparations at the site of his *kota* (hut), we are told, the old Madter-Trorie beat his drum and performed his *jojk*. Very soon, to the boy's astonishment, the cows and calves come running to the hut, behaving as if they were haunted by some monstrous thing. The boy and Madter-Trorie were then able to milk the cows and remove the sticks which had been bound over the tongues of the calves, in order to stop them from sucking the cows.

The *noajdie* of former days, my informant told me, had "powers" that we know nothing of today, because they took their secrets with them. Madter-Trorie had, according to him, asked his "powers" or "spirits" for help, but he did not know the nature of these "powers/spirits"; they belonged, however, to "the other world". To my question about »a *noajdie* sending out his alter ego or free-soul, which could be visible to the onlookers» my man answered that he had never heard of that kind of skill. A *dead noajdie* could show himself to a living person, he knew for sure, but not a *noajdie* in a trance; he used his "helpers from the other world". In my opinion, my informant's statement is characteristic of all the tales of *noajdies* among the Saamis. (My informant was Jonas Israelsson 1887–1974.)

Saami shamanism coincides with that of the North-Eurasian type, though there are variations of expression, for instance in the behaviour of the shaman in the séance. The fundamental elements are, however, in agreement, such as the invocation of the helping spirits at the beginning of the séance, the shaman's ritual movements, the rhythmical sound caused by the drum or, as amongst the Saamis, by other clatter »instruments» as well, the shaman's state of trance, and the cooperation of the audience. We are familiar enough with the external happenings at a *noajdie's* séance where ecstasy is of importance, but we know nothing of what was really happening in the trance. According to the religious tradition the *noajdie* was led to the world of the spirits or gods—to the *passee* world—by his supernatural helping-spirits and, above all, to the realm of the dead according to our early sources. His personal experience of the trance is, however, concealed; the informants did not reveal these kinds of secrets to the chroniclers. However, there is an attempt to describe a *noajdie's* experience in a so called "soul-journey" in our older sources. A writer from the 17th century, Lundius by name and Saami by origin, narrates: When a *noajdie* was returning from the 'nether world', the 'spirit of divination' (*spådoms-anda*) led the 'man's spirit' (*lappens anda*) in great haste through mountains and across valleys so that stones and sand whirled about like rain and hail . . . (Lundius 1905, 7). This is the only record of an "inner experience" we can find in our older sources, and later popular tradition contains just as

few accounts of this matter. An old Saami has, however, given us a hint of a "soul-journey", in this case a journey to the realm of the dead, and we will use the story as an illustration of a *noajdie*'s speculation on this question. Lars Pirak, a Saami artist and author, has recalled a *subtsasav*, a story, that he heard as a boy. The story is related to a descendant of a *noajdie* and it describes a journey to the realm of the dead. When a person dies, it says, his "soul" will dive into a hole behind the *boassjoe*—in former days this meant the *holy* area of a *kota*—and fly away like a bird through a long corridor in the inner parts of the earth. It will be necessary to take food, for the journey will last a long time. During the voyage the "soul" will be surrounded by deep darkness and a terrible noise. At the end of the corridor he will see a luminous point like a star to which he will come closer and closer, and, when he reaches it he will be enclosed in a hot and colourful illumination, and the heat will be almost unbearable. He will see his own body lying on the earth in the distance, for now he will be flying through space at a tremendous speed over mountains and over vast, green areas. All the time he will be surrounded by colours like those of the rainbow, and in his hair there will be sparkling stars. After his flight through space he will reach a long beach with sand, and the surrounding area will be covered with green grass and yellow flowers in abundance. Then he will know that he has arrived in the realm of the dead—he has reached the home of his ancestors (Lars Pirak 1932—. His story will be published in full.)

There is a common pattern in the conception of sorcery held by the peoples of Northern Scandinavia: they all believed that there were persons who were able to influence their surroundings by supernatural knowledge: "to use trolldom" (with all its connotations) in the Scandinavian language, but "to get into contact with the helping spirits of the *passe* world" in the Saami language, by my own interpretation. There was also a common belief in the conception of the soul: one's soul could leave one's body and be materialized in an animal and then function as one's alter ego and guardian spirit. In the Scandinavian tradition a person who was skilled in *hamnskifte* (change of shape) was able to influence another person in his "soul-animal-shape" (Ström 1967, 206), but in my opinion we do not find this conception among the Saamis, where a *noajdie*'s knowledge and skill depended on his helping-spirit from the *passe* world. Maybe we can say that the difference was on the cultic level.

The history of the Saamis has been written by people other than the Saamis themselves, and their customs, both religious and secular, have mostly been described from a foreign point of view in our older sources. Thus the trance-state of a *noajdie* was sometimes believed to be *hamnskifte* in accordance with the tradition of, for instance, *fylgja* as a human-

(woman-)shaped being.⁴ The chroniclers are, so to speak, limited by their own frames of reference and the "legends" that were created about the Saamis were formed from their own point of view.

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⁴ The Scandinavians believed that a man's inner ego, his soul, named *hugr*, could free itself from the human body, for instance in dreams, and be materialized in an animal. This transformation was called *hamnskifte* (change of shape) and this "soul-animal" was named *fylgja*. Among Saami traditional beliefs we find the same thing: a man's soul freed itself from its human covering and manifested itself in an animal, a bird above all. These "soul-animals" functioned as an

alter ego and a guardian spirit in both cases. The Scandinavians believed, however, that *fylgja* sometimes turned into a woman-shaped being, but, in my opinion, this idea was foreign to the Saamis. Furthermore, in his "soul-animal-shape" a person could do evil or good to another person, according to the Scandinavians, while a *noajdie* had to obtain help from the "other world", where his helping-spirits lived.