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INCIDENTAL ETHNOGRAPHY: WALDEMAR JOCHELSON AND HIS MONOGRAPH *THE YAKUT*

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The beginning

Waldemar Jochelson's monograph *The Yakut* was published in 1933 by The American Museum of Natural History in New York. It is surprising to find out this monumental monograph that contains significant heritage material for the Yakut people, also known as Sakha, was incidental, almost a by-product of the Jesup expedition outputs. It is presumed the monograph is based on data Jochelson collected when participating in two large scientific expeditions, but in reality the collection of data for the monograph started long before.

The collection of data for this volume started in 1888 when Jochelson, a political exile, was sent from the Peter and Paul fortress in St. Petersburg by the Russian Tsarist authorities to Yakutia (Jochelson 1933:197). Here Jochelson would spend nine years, including four years as a prisoner. Like many of his educated and liberally-minded contemporaries, who happened to be in similar situations, Jochelson used such circumstances for studying the culture of the native people living in the area to occupy himself (Vakhtin 2001:79). He was initially sent to Olekminsk and later transferred further to Srednekolymsk, where he immersed himself in the life of the native people from whom he learned the skills of living in the taiga, travelling, fishing and hunting (Ksenofontov 1992:100; Slobodin 2005a:2). In this environment, Jochelson applied his research skills, analytical mind and his writing ability to produce, initially, two papers *The Skoptsi of Olekminsk* (Jochelson 1894) and *Notes on the Population in the Yakut Oblast' in Historic and Geographic Respects* (Jochelson 1895). These works were presented to the Russian Geographical Society and Jochelson was awarded the silver medal of the Society (Slobodin 2005:97). Following these publications, he was invited to take part in the Yakut expedition of the East Siberian branch of the Imperial Geographical Society in 1894–1896, also known as the Sibiriakov (or Sibiryakov) expedition, named after an industrialist and philanthropist who funded the expedition.

In the years Waldemar Jochelson spent in Yakutia, he accumulated abundant material about the native peoples and it is possible that during the Sibiriakov expedition, Jochelson conceived the idea of this separate manuscript dedicated to the Yakut people. This is apparent from his correspondence to the Russian Geographical Society dated 15 January 1896, where Jochelson reported he "[…] continued conducting measurements and photographing the Yakut, collected more or less full material about the economic situation of the district, economic activities, etc., finally, tried to add to my notes on other issues of the Yakut ethnography." He adds at the end of this reporting letter that "[r]egarding the Yakut, I have the most diverse notes about all aspects of their life" (Sirina and Shinkovoi 2007:353).

Fig. 1 Jochelson (right) with political exiles. Image #11092, American Museum of Natural History Library.

Fig. 2 W. Jochelson, N.G. Buxton, and W. Bogoras in San Francisco before their departure for Siberia, spring 1900. Image #338343. American Museum of Natural History Library.

However, the material accumulated during Sibiriakov's expedition had to wait for a while, as after this expedition had finished, Jochelson was summoned to participate in another expedition—the Jesup North Pacific in 1897–1902. Jochelson's participation in this expedition was fortuitous and was a result of correspondence between Franz Boas, the leader of the expedition and curator at the American Museum of Natural History, and Professor Friedrich Wilhelm Radloff [Vasilii Radlov], the permanent secretary of the Russian Academy of Science. Boas needed to replace a person who had failed to join the expedition and requested assistance with finding a suitable person fitted "to studying the customs, manners, languages and physical characteristics" of the peoples of the northern regions (Vakhtin 2001:77). Radloff in his response unreservedly recommended Waldemar Jochelson and his colleague Waldemar Bogoras (Cole 2001:37; Vakhtin 2001:77). It is possible that Radloff, himself a researcher of the Yakut language, knew Jochelson as a capable man and a talented linguist and maybe he saw in Jochelson a future excellent scholar.

While working for the Jesup expedition Jochelson focused on collecting ethnographic data about the Koryak and the Yukaghir people. But in the process of the Jesup expedition and closer to the end, Jochelson arranged and agreed with Franz Boas the concluding stage of his expedition would be spent among the Yakut people with the purpose of collecting material artifacts. Jochelson feared the culture of the Yakut, who he described as an "interesting tribe", was "disappearing under the influence of climate, Russian contact, and other factors" (Jochelson 1933:197). His task, then, as he recognised it, was to provide a detailed record of specific elements of culture, its rituals, traditions and celebrations. The objects and ethnographic data about the Yakut people collected by Jochelson in the field, although not "an objective of Jesup expedition" as described by Boas (Vakhtin 2001:86), were included in the formidable corpus of data generated by the expedition. Possibly in the process of collecting and organizing the data, it became evident to Jochelson the rich material collected about the Yakut would need to be presented as a separate monograph.

It is most likely that in the process of writing up, Jochelson went back to the collected artifacts which continued to provide him with information. Thus the objects that Jochelson collected: 917 Yakut artifacts, 400 photographs, 225 anthropometric measurements, 20 gypsum masks, 30 phonographic recordings with songs, tales and shamanic rituals, as well as botanical and zoological objects (Ivanov 1999:68), could be considered an integral part of the monograph. Drawings of these objects and high-quality photographs are very important features of the book as well. The black and white photographs taken at various locations are austere and laconic, most of them taken with models in controlled positions, but serve as articulate underpinnings that expand on the descriptive text of Jochelson.

While Waldemar Jochelson was mistaken in his disconsolate prediction about the Yakut culture disappearing, it is due to the scholar's foresight and providence that there is such a rich legacy of objects and ethnographic material held at the American

Museum of Natural History (Ivanova-Unarova 2015:2). Importantly, there is a significant volume devoted to Sakha people, their history and culture.

Methods

In his letter to Boas, Radloff refers to Jochelson and his colleague Bogoras as people "well acquainted with the countries to which they will have to go, and have already made special studies of the languages as well as habits and customs of the people" (in Vakhtin 2001:77). Indeed, it would have been hardly possible to find a better suited person than Waldemar Jochelson for such a task. The characteristic provided by Radloff highlights an important methodological aspect of the research Jochelson carried out, which is now referred to in anthropology as 'participant observation'. For Jochelson, though, being immersed in the life of the native communities for extended periods was just an aspect of his life in exile. The important distinction between a prolonged residence in a native community in Siberia and a scheduled research trip was in living, coping, and surviving the harsh conditions. Involuntary residence and thus an immersion into a different culture gave Jochelson an opportunity to carry out continuous observation and participation. This fundamental difference in the initial setting of research had resulted in a different kind of qualitative data that was not always obtainable for scholars on a short-term trip. This important aspect of collecting data in this absorbed manner was consistent with Franz Boas' own convictions of doing research among the native people. One main research perspective maintained by Boas that changed the discipline of anthropology was that cultures are complex systems consisting of many interlinked aspects and are always evolving (Darnell 1999:45–47, Brandišauskas 2009:1).

Boas described the goals, principles and methods of collecting data: "to study of the people's own interpretation of their traditions. It thus seemed supremely important to document the anthropological material through uncensored accounts of natives in their own words and in their own language, to preserve the original meaning" (Boas [1908] 2001:19). It would be fair to say Jochelson had been practicing these methods long before the Jesup expedition started. Of course, he did not give names to the exact methods he used to collect data but from the descriptions of his travels and visitations to various sites, it is clear how important Jochelson considered such methods of data collection. He wrote: "While a naturalist everywhere and always in this area can be with nature, with all its specifics, novelty and surprises, an ethnographer has to chase the object of his study, a human being, and spend much time searching for him, but this human being is utterly interesting, and there is so much to study here that more than two people can spend a much longer period of time" (in Sirina and Shinkovoi 2007:345).

Jochelson collected information about the Yakut focusing on the historical and geographical data, ethnographic descriptions about dwellings, tools, clothing, food,

trades, customs, language and beliefs of the local people. To provide a comprehensive presentation of the region and its environment in his monograph, Jochelson incorporated data related to orography, climate, geography, flora and fauna. He described his pursuits as: "Although my chief objectives were anthropological, I endeavoured to obtain geographical and topographical data, particularly in regions not previously visited. With this end in view I always carried the necessary instruments, compasses, sling thermometers, aneroid barometers, boiling point thermometers, and others, and kept systematic diaries" (Jochelson 1933:66). In this section Jochelson uses a lot of information from other sources, e.g. Wittenburg (1927), but it is obvious from the book he undertook some field trips to remote places to collect the required scientific data. He wrote about climbing mountains matter-of-factly: "according to my travel diary on the eastern slope of the Stanovoi ridge" (ibid.:70). He also mentioned going up 500 meters on the Taigonos Peninsula (currently the Magadan region) to record a type of vegetation (ibid). Jochelson's contribution to the research in fauna has been marked by finding two new species not previously recorded: the Kolyma pike and the Kolyma red-backed mouse that after such discovery was named after Jochelson, *Evotomys Jochelsoni* (ibid.:72).

On ethnographic knowledge and relationship with informants

The anthropological work with indigenous people of that period was often accompanied by a horde of anthropometric data and the photographic images of informants "dressed and undressed, in awkward front and side views, as racial-type data, uncomfortable artifacts of the arrogance of a young science" (Kendall et al. 1997:7). While Jochelson saw himself as a tasked ethnographer and a recorder of various data, it seems for him his informants were not mere models sitting for anthropometric measurements in front of him and his wife, Dina Jochelson-Brodskaia (Kasten and Dürr 2016:19). The native people shared with them the accommodation, food, guided them in their travels, went hunting and fishing, spent leisure time telling jokes and having a good laugh. For Jochelson, having good relationships with the native people was important for work and life. In his letters to Boas he wrote about help he received from local people in various locations, recognizing their indispensable contribution to his work (Ivanova-Unarova 2015:3). He mentioned their names in his letters with an occasional request to send various fishing and hunting gear as a gratitude for their contribution. He acknowledged it would have been impossible to gather such a great collection of objects without the assistance of his friends: "Despite short time that I had to collect the Yakut collection, thanks to my knowledge of the region and my old friends, I guess, this will be the first full ethnographic collection that will leave Yakutsk" (in Ivanov 1999:19). He adds, proudly it seems, he "[…] received 150 items as gifts from my many Sakha friends" (Ivanova-Unarova 2017:89). Indeed, the reference to 'many Sakha friends' demonstrated that Jochelson was not simply an ethnographer

and a scholar, but a person with good ties and connections with local people. His considerate attitude to the cultural heritage of the native people, knowledge of the language, and his genuine interest in learning about the native culture earned him respect and deference among the Yakut people in this area.

The structure of the book

Jochelson produced *The Koryak* in 1905 and *The Yukaghir and Yukaghirized Tungus* in 1910. By the time he was putting together the monograph on *The Yakut* he had extensive experience of presenting such rich material and information in a book format. *The Koryak* monograph was a hefty 809 pages and *The Yukaghir* had 458 pages. In comparison with these two volumes *The Yakut*, with only 220 pages, was a much shorter compilation. It nevertheless was aimed at presenting a comprehensive representation of the Yakut people.

The intended broad scope reflected in the structure and wide-ranging aspects of life of the native people are characteristic of the monographs of that period that aimed to present the all-embracing portrayal of the studied peoples. One can easily see parallels between the layout of Jochelson's book and Seroshevskii's[1] serious volume on the Yakut (1896). The structure of the book, again a convention of the time, is similar to the content of *The Yukaghir* and *The Koryak.* This monograph includes important sections on geography, language, anthropology, religion, family and kinship, and material culture. The book opens with history and narratives that go back to the founding legends.

In order to compile a comprehensive coverage in the book and the fullest possible material in various sections, Jochelson built on the works of his predecessors: Fisher, Seroshevskii, Troshchanskii, Berg, Radloff, Pekarskii, Wittenburg, and others. In many sections of the book, Jochelson continues an academic dialogue with these scholars, ethnographers, linguists and natural scientists, who studied the Yakut people prior to him. Such conversations were often presented as a continuous debate or disputation. He wrote, for instance: "His statements concerning the inhabitants of the region are not consistent with the actual facts". And on occasions he was rather categorical: "He believes the Yakut are Mongol and that the Tungus are the aborigines of the country. Actually the Yakut are Turkic. Both tribes are immigrants: The Yakut from the Baikal country and the Tungus from the Amur region, or perhaps from southeastern China" (Jochelson 1933:69). Grounding initial information in the works of his predecessors, Jochelson added new or expanded on the existing knowledge in some sections of the book. What follows are brief highlights of such aspects of knowledge from some sections of the monograph.

Two sections of the book *Religion. Pre-Christian Beliefs* and *Shamanism* comprise a logical block on beliefs and their practice and occupy an important place in the book. While the part of the book devoted to the system of beliefs presents the fundamental

1 Jochelson's spelling is 'Sieroszevski'.

points succinctly, the following part, *Shamanism,* is remarkable in its detail. Jochelson used the works of his predecessors in this section but a large portion was based on the interviews that Jochelson held in Meginski *ulus* (district), east of the city of Yakutsk, and in Rodchevo village on the Kolyma river, close to Verkhnekolymsk (ibid:116). Jochelson revealed the importance of the shamanic practice and its function through the detailed description of the shaman's dress. Jochelson referred to a Yakut, named Slyeptzov, who sold the shaman dress to him for the museum collection and described the significance of details on the dress. The described shamanic coat served as a transformer—it turned the shaman into a warrior and provided him with an armor to help fight with "hostile shamans and spirits" (ibid.:111). "The fringe around the coat represents feathers", described Jochelson, explaining how the coat turned the shaman into a bird able to fly between many levels of the sky (ibid:118). All details on the shaman's coat are given names in the Yakut language, with an occasional variant in the Tungus, and were dictated by the local people and shamans themselves. The shamanic chants were recorded by Jochelson on his phonograph (ibid:122). From Jochelson's descriptions it is very easy to get a sense the shaman was a very dynamic and mobile figure, who moved and paced all the time on the spot. He also moved in the alternative universe ("the world of spirits") with the help of his drum that appeared to be either a reindeer or a horse, and the drumstick was his whip (ibid.:119). In the related two sections on pottery and metals (blacksmithery and silversmithery) Jochelson analyzed the significant role the smiths played in the Yakut society and commented on the social status of the Yakut blacksmiths, who were ranked as high as a shaman as they were believed to possess supernatural powers. Jochelson makes parallels with the blacksmith practices in Africa and Pamir, making wider connections to explain the phenomena.

In the section *The Family and Kinship,* Jochelson demonstrated very detailed knowledge of the Yakut principles of kinship and provided the reader with the terminology on family ties. The terms are presented as a mini dictionary and are organized in alphabetical order. Most of the terms in this vocabulary are obsolete, but the list serves as more than just a straightforward dictionary. It presents and explains the system of relations between members of the extended family (*Je-usa*, mother's clan or *Aga-usa*, father's clan), as well as values and principles of such organization in the Yakut society. Studying the list, one can learn more about economic relationships between its members, for example "*kulut*—a slave or a servant" (Jochelson 1933:126). The list also contains some rules of behavior, and one such example is the word *kinniti,* described as a "custom of avoidance" by the daughter-in-law. The custom is explained as prohibition of appearing and showing herself or uncovering "her body before the elder male relatives of her husband, particularly her father-in-law" (ibid.:126), thus highlighting modesty, diffidence, and shyness as models of behavior.

The section *Material Culture* includes a significant subsection, *Pottery*, where Jochelson presented the tools used for making clay objects. He pointed out the pottery is an evidence of the southern origin of the Yakut people that could be confirmed

by the archaeological findings excavated in the Baikal region (Jochelson 1933:157). While pottery was a very long-term activity of the Yakut, it was of a utilitarian use and never developed into an art form (ibid.:159). Working with metals did turn into an art, as Jochelson demonstrated in a separate subsection on *Metals* (ibid.:163–179). This subsection contains an interesting range of terminology of various metals, tools and products, including the renowned Yakut knives (*bysax*), axe (*sügä*), etc. In this section Jochelson provided a careful description of the objects made of silver. While the Yakut were "mediocre tinsmiths" (ibid.:173), they were excellent blacksmiths and silversmiths, and Jochelson devoted a subsection to the mastery of the Yakut's work with copper and silver.

The subsection *Clothing* contains detailed descriptions of types of dresses, costumes and footwear, well supplemented with drawings and photographs. The section conspicuously lacks descriptions and analysis of the decorative embroidery work which appears in the section on *ysyakh*, written earlier as a separate paper and entitled *The Kumiss Festivals*.

The language section is, as Jochelson admitted, a "brief sketch on the Yakut language" (ibid.:98). This section, predominantly describing the grammar of the Yakut language, is informed by the outstanding work of Böhtlingk, as well as Radloff, Iastremskii, Samoilovich, Pekarskii (ibid.:98–99). While most of this section is built on the works of other scholars, it also highlights Jochelson's outstanding knowledge of spoken Yakut and his great talent as a linguist.

The Kumiss Festivals

This section of the monograph was written by Jochelson as a separate paper for the Boas Anniversary Volume and it occupies a special place in the monograph (Jochelson 1906). The *kumiss*[2] festival, also known as *ysyakh* or *yhyakh*, has always been a major traditional celebration for the Sakha people. There are historical descriptions of this festival written by many explorers and travellers, starting with Ides from his travels in the 17th century with further contributions by Strahlenberg, Messerschmidt, Lindenau, Middendorff and others (Romanova 1994:4–8). The monograph of Seroshevskii on *The Yakut* includes a section about the *ysyakh* with which, undoubtedly, Jochelson was familiar (Seroshevskii 1993 [1896]:445–447). Jochelson's chapter therefore complements the works of his predecessors and fills in several gaps.

Closer to the end of the Jesup expedition and while still up north, Jochelson communicated to Boas his plans of collecting the Yakut material culture objects for the American Museum of Natural History. He decided to go to the *ulus* on the right bank of the Lena River and explained his choice by saying in the eastern ulus "old traditions are preserved better than in western" (Ivanov 1999:67). In order to do so, Jochelson

2 *Kumiss* is a drink made with slightly fermented mare's milk.

arrived in Yakutsk at the end of April 1902 and, five days later, crossed the Lena River[3] to the Boturusskii *ulus* (Churapcha and Taatta *ulus* presently) where he stayed for three weeks in May (Ivanova-Unarova 2018).

It is apparent from his writing he was in correspondence with his Yakut friends regarding the forthcoming visit and his intention to collect artifacts. In the chapter we read: "I was fortunate enough not only to collect a great number of ancient kumiss vessels in various remote localities, but also to arrange a kumiss festival not far from Yakutsk" (Jochelson 1933:198). While it is not clear what he meant by "to arrange", it is hard to imagine that Jochelson was involved in the organization of the *ysyakh* himself. Zinaida Ivanova-Unarova, who studied Jochelson's archival documents, believes that the *ysyakh* celebration was organized purposefully for Jochelson and in response to his request for assistance (Ivanova-Unarova 2015). We can therefore assume Jochelson meant his visit served as an excuse for organizing a *ysyakh*, confirming the fact *ysyakh* festivals could have been held at different times, not only in the summer (Jochelson 1933:202–203).

The explanation of the significance of the festival is opened with the detailed introduction to the *olonkho,* an epic narrative of the founding legend of the y*syakh*. This is followed with the description of the main ceremony of the *ysyakh*, the ritual offerings to the gods to thank them for their benevolence. However Jochelson pointed out the celebration was not only about religious significance, it was important for social ties too: "During the summer, in olden times, every rich man arranged a kumiss festival at which all members of the clan assembled and were entertained. Other people, and frequently whole clans, were also invited" (Jochelson 1933:202). Exceptionally hierarchical, the *ysyakh* celebration was a re-confirmation of the social standing, as observed and described by Jochelson precisely: "[…] the boys and girls gave the goblets of sacrificial kumiss to the elder and honored members of the clan, both male and female, who […] drank from the goblets and passed them on to the less important and the younger people. Behind every honored or aged member of the clan, sat or stood his domestics, less esteemed relatives […]" (Jochelson 1933:203). However, such hierarchical ladder also inferred some social duties that the honored members of the society had for the poor of their clan and laborers. Indeed, such *ysyakh* celebration was a way to provide some attention and care to them.

The chapter contains the most detailed description of the important ritual of the *ysyakh*—drinking of the *kumiss*. It also includes the detailed description of the *choron* (carved wooden goblets), utensils and other paraphernalia used specifically for this ritual and the *ysyakh* in general. Jochelson enclosed a detailed explanation of the ornamental motifs on the *choron,* predominantly geometrical straight lines or curved line designs and pointed out people were not depicted on the designs (Jochelson 1933:

3 At the end of April it becomes impossible to cross the Lena River once the ice starts breaking. Jochelson would have been in a hurry to cross the river. He wrote about it in his letter to Boas five days later (Ivanova-Unarova 2015:3).

209). The section has a record of 17 design patterns used in carving and decorating the wooden dishware and ritual objects. The understanding of ornaments and designs is an important aspect of the contemporary craftsmanship in Sakha where similar research is continued by the local craftsmen (Neustroev 2007).

On meaning and significance of the book

As a person who immigrated to America, Jochelson turned into an outcast in the Soviet academia and his works were not accepted on the ideological level (Shavrov 1935; Ivanov 1999:68–69; Brandišauskas 2009:176). Only some acknowledged Jochelson's important contribution to the development of the corpus of knowledge about the native people and the Yakut specifically. Gavriil Ksenofontov (1888–1938), a scholar known for his works on the Yakut history and ethnography, wrote about Jochelson's monograph: "Its publication is of great import for the development of scientific Yakutology" (in Ivanova-Unarova 2017:93). Ksenofontov describes Jochelson as a well-known expert on the Yakut: "The latest work by Jochelson *The Yakuts* by its scope is no less significant than *The Yakuts* by V. Seroshevskii and was conceived with the clear purpose to fill the gaps of the latter by writing additionally about the new achievements of the ethnographic knowledge about the Yakut" (Ksenofontov 1992 [1937]:101).

The impact of the Jesup Expedition was far-reaching and helped to shape American anthropology (Darnell 1999:38). Similarly, according to Nikolai Vakhtin, the Jesup expedition helped to shape Russian ethnography and ethnology: "It is a fact the JNPE played an important role in shaping Russian scholarship, especially the development of Russian (and, later, Soviet) research in social anthropology, ethnography, and linguistics of the Siberian Native people […]. To some extent, to study the roots of Russian northern research after 1897 is to study the history of the JNPE" (Vakhtin 2001:71). The significance of the work produced by Jochelson and his contribution to the anthropological tradition, however, is only now being discovered by the Russian and Sakha audiences, as demonstrated further.

The material collected by Jochelson and photographic images he took are proving to be very important now that the Sakha people are reinstating the importance of the festival. Many elements of this quintessentially Sakha celebration have been lost or heavily modified during the Soviet period. In some places celebrations of the *ysyakh* were not held for decades. There is a huge interest in revitalization of the traditions, re-discovery of the rituals, learning about their meaning and significances. Jochelson's careful description of these rituals serves as a guidebook. The section of the book on the *kumiss* festivals was published in Yakutsk as a separate brochure (Iokhel'son 2015).

In the summer of 2015 my colleagues Alison Brown, Eleanor Peers, and I were working on a project[4] devoted to the *ysyakh* and visited a few *ysyakh* celebrations in the city and other remote places in the region. During that trip we realized the name of Jochelson, his research work in Yakutia and the specific work on *ysyakh* together with the images he took, were well known to many people in Sakha (Yakutia). The section from his book on the *ysyakh* translated into Sakha and Russian was widely distributed. The photographic images taken by Jochelson extensively circulated on the Internet, WhatsApp and other social media. A few times during the interviews, carried out for the project, people would refer either to Jochelson's research or to the images made by him. On one occasion during the *ysyakh* festivities, a friend commenting on the celebration taking place right in front of us, in order to make her point clearer, pulled out a cell phone and presented us with an image taken by Jochelson depicting exactly the same aspect, but close up. In a curious juxtaposition of the historical-contemporary and the virtual-actual, one could see two images at once: a black and white image taken by Jochelson on the screen of an electronic gadget and the colorful moving image of the same festival, animated and thriving, 114 years apart.

Conclusion

Jochelson's work *The Yakut* is undeniably a significant contribution to the knowledge about this ethnic group and a key cultural record of the time. It presents an important part in the historic conversation of many scholars engaged in the research devoted to the Yakut over a considerable period.

This monograph, which emerged as an incidental output of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, today presents a rich legacy for the contemporary Sakha. In the present Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) some people are familiar with the content of the book, which is yet to be fully translated into Sakha and Russian. Some have familiarized themselves with the book through the translated excerpts devoted to the celebration of the *ysyakh*. Some are familiar with the images taken by Jochelson, which seem to live their own life, floating and circulating on the Sakha social media, generating discussion, evoking memories, inspiring new ideas and creative projects.

"The large ornamented wooden kumiss goblets described below are not easily obtained at present. The conical birchbark summer dwelling is no longer used", Jochelson wrote at the opening of the section predicting a decline of the Yakut culture (Jochelson 1933:197). This prediction was to warn about changes in the traditional culture and lifestyle, changes in the purposes and aims of the festival. Jochelson was mistaken in his prophecies of the festival disappearing, yet there might be an element of truth in the sense that the *ysyakh* celebration serves different purposes now. The contemporary

4 We are grateful to the UK AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) for funding the project "Narrative Objects: The Sakha Summer Festival and Cultural Revitalization" which ran from 2015–2018.

ysyakh gatherings are about the multifaceted identities of people, the region, and its cultures. They are about political agendas, as well as creativity and ambitions. Jochelson's images and the partially translated text from his book are employed as a point to explore and develop people's own traditions and culture, and, equally, to communicate a sense of proud heritage and a confirmation of authenticity of contemporary celebrations. The existing engagement of people with Jochelson's work and its alignment with contemporary events in Yakutia is a testament to Jochelson's knowledge and the scholastic rigour he applied to document and research Yakut culture.

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Fig. 3 On the way to the *ysyakh.* (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 4 Entering to the *ysyakh* through the sacred gates is a cleansing ritual. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 5 A fragment of the sacred gate. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 6 The festival is held at a large open space called *tyuhyulge*, meaning "the place where gods descend." It is common to have a carved sculpture of The Tree of Life (*Aal-Luk-Mas*) which connects all three worlds, bringing gods, people and evil spirits together. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 7 Welcoming guests to the *ysyakh.* (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 8 Dancers with *chorons* open the festivities. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 9 A horse rider entering the *ysyakh* area opens the festival. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 10 From this moment *ysyakh* celebration will continue for a few days. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 11 Getting ready for the opening play. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 12 A short play from *olonkho*, ancient epic narrative, opens the performing part of the *ysyakh*. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 13 An *algyschyt* holds a special ritual of addressing the deities. For this ritual he is accompanied by his young assistants. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 14 An *algyschyt* is addressing the deities and thanks them for their kindness. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 15 The ritual of addressing the deities is performed in front of the fire. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 16 While making offerings of *kumiss* to the fire, an *algyschyt* requests for benevolence from the deities. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 17 A ritual of feeding the spirits of the land. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 18 Drinking *kumiss* (fermented mare's milk) at the festival is an important ritual. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 19 Wooden cups (*chorons*) are used to serve *kumiss*, fermented mare's milk. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 20 White horse is associated with *D'ehegei,* the God of Horses. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 21 Traditional pastoralists, Sakha relied on horse in many aspects of their life. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 22 Traditional Sakha costumes are prepared by the skilled seamstresses. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 23 Many young people perform at the *ysyakh* by playing music or dancing. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 24 Horse racing is a very important part of the *ysyakh*. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 25 Wrestling, a traditional sport, continues to be very popular among Sakha. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 26 *Ysyakh* is a carefree time for children. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 27 Dancing the *osuokhai* is an important part of the *ysyakh* festivities. (photo: M. Unarov)

Fig. 28 *Osuokhai,* a circle dance, brings many people together and can last for hours. (photo: M. Unarov)