

# ÁILLOHAŠ AND HIS IMAGE DRUM: THE NATIVE POET AS SHAMAN

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## Introduction

In the circumpolar north throughout time, shamans have been empowered to negotiate among the sensate, multifaceted realities of the human world and intuitive, multifarious realities of the more-than-human world, including the *angaqoq* for the Inuit, the *noaidi* for the Sámi, and the various shamans for Siberian peoples. However, Christian conversions, particularly in the colonial period, and modern realities, particularly in the postcolonial aftermath of World War II, have deeply impacted the presence of shamanism in these northern, native cultures. Much anthropology points to the diminution or demise of shamanic activities for northern peoples, but I contend that the realm of the shaman has, in many instances, shifted to the from the private domain of the family and family group to the public domain of literature and art, a domain at once strange and familiar to those with shamanic capacities.

Literature, by its text-bound nature public, enduring and authoritative, is markedly distinct from traditional shamanic practice, which is secret, fleeting, and oral. A published poet (or artist or musician), too, with a known persona and durable legacy, is made manifest in different ways from the traditional shaman. However, both poet/artist and shaman are equipped in remarkable ways to negotiate between worlds, and in the hands of shaman-poets, text becomes the tool of prophecy and mediation.

In this article, I will look particularly at the work of Áillohaš (the Sámi name for poet Nils-Aslak Valkeapää) and his pivotal work *Beaivi, Áhčážan* (*The Sun, My Father*). A deep reading of a number of poems from *Beaivi, Áhčážan* will provide the substance of this discussion.

*Beaivi, Áhčážan* is the centrepiece of Áillohaš's tripartite mythic cycle, including the lyrical and personal *Ruoktu váimmus* (*Trekways of the Wind*) and the mythic and universal *Eadni, eannážan* (as yet untranslated into English, *The Earth, My Mother*). In the original Sámi,

all three books integrate image and text in controlled and mythical ways, enabling any reader, regardless of language abilities, to imagine ways of melding tradition and posterity. Yet, Valkeapää goes beyond mere intimation in these works; he specifically calls *Beaivi*, *Áhčážan* his self-proclaimed *jietnagovadas*, or *voice drum*, a shamanic device that allows him as shaman-poet to look into the past, into the future or into the depths of Sámi realities.

In Western terms alone, *The Sun, My Father* is a rich and complex cycle of poetry. American readers, for example, identify readily with the poet's ability to dream, his apt ways of describing an exotic way of life, and his gentle persistence in bearing witness against Western exploitation. And yet, the translations are remarkably stripped of context. The poet has chosen to consider the translations – in the Scandinavian languages, English, and Finnish -- to be mere guides to the original work. Thus, most Western readers do not have ready access to the fullness or richness of the Sámi version.

The original Sámi work, *Beaivi*, *Áhčážan* is words, as well, but it is also much, much more. Its 586 poems and photos is an integrated and layered piece of art, a shaman drum capable of seeing into other worlds, into the past, and into the future. It is encyclopedic; it embraces the totality of Sámi culture and history. And *Beaivi*, *Áhčážan* presents this mythic and poetic reality through the *govadas*-image drum.

### **Govadasas govat: The Drum as Metaphor**

Áillohaš constructs this cognitive map with archival photos and yoiks. But the poet also speaks explicitly about the power of images to evoke images. For example, he writes epigrammatically and enigmatically about the nature of symbols and images in his very synthesized Poem 31 at the beginning of *Beaivi*, *Áhčážan*, reinvoking similar imagic powers in his final creedlike and prophetic Poem 558. Both poems play extensively on the word *govva*, the Sámi root word for "image."

In the Sámi version of Poem 31, the alternating alliteration between hard "g's" and sibilant "v's" reiterates through the seven short lines, a poetic feature carried through nicely in Sammallahti's Finnish translation. The vocalic correspondences between Sámi and Finnish are immediately apparent, with the Sámi "g's" hardening into Finnish

"k's." As in the Sámi *govadas*, with its roots in the word *govva* (image), the imagic (*kuva*, image) origins of a Finnish drum, *kuvahinen*, are apparent. This play on sounds and words makes for a very compact, very complex, very beautiful poem, intimating that images are images-of-images (*govva/gova/govaid*).

31. govva	kuva	image
gova	kuvan	the symbols
govaid	kuvia	of the image
govváí	kuvaisa	symbolic
govadasa govat	kuvahisen kuvat	the images of the image
girjáí	kirjava	varied
govvás máilbmi	kuvaisa maailma	world full of images

While the English translation of Poem 31 (as of the entire *Beaivi, Áhčážan*) is a responsible one, it epitomizes the problems of correspondences between languages and between cultures. Sámi and Finnish are near cousins, both belonging to the Finno-Ugric language family, with many similarities of syntax and derivation, as well as some common linguistic heritage from a hunting/herding past.

For instance, the Finnish word *kuva* was originally perhaps the term for a decoy used by hunters to lure down birds (Meri, *Suomen sanojen*). If, in fact, the Finno-Ugric root for "bird" decoy is the same now used for "image," this poem has veritable power of attracting game and snaring it. Certainly, such word play is frequent among the Sámi, as for instance, in Paulus Utsi's clever titles for his books of poetry: *Giela giela* (*Snaring the Language*) and *Giela gielain* (*Snaring with Language*). The Sámi word *giella* means both "language; utterance, power of speech" and "snare, trap (esp. for grouse and hare)" [Nielsen].

Such subtle, Aesopian, hidden use of language has a long history among the Sámi, as Harald Gaski describes in *In the Shadow of the Midnight Sun*:

Images are extremely important in the Sami's old epic poetry. Particularly elaborate are hidden messages conveyed in the more rebellious songs from the period of colonization. The Sami of that time no doubt feared being understood by any public officials who had acquired a little knowledge of their language and might happen to hear one of their songs. Therefore, they avoided the use of direct language and concealed implied messages in subtle texts; only the initiated could get the points being made. This means of communication served at least two purposes at once: on the superficial level, it contained a harmless tale of various events in the lives of the Sami, while its underlying message to the Sami audience conveyed a call to resist cultural suppression and assimilation. (15)

On the other hand, Sámi and English have very little in common. According to Pekka Sammallahti, Professor of Sámi Languages at the University of Oulu, Finland, the problems are already manifest in the core vocabulary of the two languages; sixty percent of the core words of Sámi do not exist in English, and sixty percent of the core words of English do not exist in Sámi. (Personal conversation, 1998.)

*Govva* (*kuva*) is a loan word from the Germanic to Proto-Finnic, from a reconstructed prehistoric past. [<Germanic \**skuwwa*, cf. Gothic *skuggwa* 'mirror', archaic *skuggi*, 'shadow' (*Suomen sanojen alkuperä*, translation by Dana). While both Finnish and Sámi do absorb loan words, the proportion of loan words is significantly less than in English, as is evident in the variety of ways the single word *kuva* can be translated into English:

*picture, illustration, image, idol, figure, effigy, photograph, reflection, impression (Uusi Suomi).*

or by the variety of options for the English word "picture" one has from a standard English dictionary or thesaurus.

In their English translation, Salisbury, Nordström, and Gaski struggle with very difficult problems of syntax, of alliteration, and of meaning in this small, nine-word poem. The resulting translation seems a bit less poetic. What does the poet mean? That image comprises the symbols of the images? That an image is compressed images?

31. image	31. image,
the symbols	images
of the images	of images
symbolic	imagic
the images of the image	image drum images
varied	magic
world full of images	imagic world
(Salisbury, Nordström, and Gaski)	(Dana version)

In an alternate offering, I might use punctuation to compensate for the synthetic nature of Sámi in analytical English, and rely on the single word "image," with its "**im**aginative" and "**mag**ical" associations, to translate *govva*, thus:

<i>govva</i>	image,
<i>gova</i>	images
<i>govaid</i>	of images

Whatever the translation, the poet delves deeply into the qualities of images for their evocative and shamanic powers on the *govadas*-drum. Near the end of *Beaivi*, *Áhčážan* is the longest poem in the whole book; Poem 558 is a long prophetic poem, covering eight pages (which I have marked individually as 558a, 558b, etc.) This poem starts out with a series of echoing, lingering sounds and concludes with large, quiet chords, and the sounds of birds in the distance. It is a kind of elemental catalog, listing with a kind of perpetual wonder all that is important to Sámi culture, but more significantly, it is a kind of summary prophesy/history of the Sámi people, alternating between the poet-shaman's visions and his thoughts, in plain text and italics.

He starts by declaring that it is "as if / I myself / inscribe [myself](558a)" and identifies in a dreamlike way with the images he himself has created:

soapmásin jáhkán	sometimes I believe
ahte mun dat lean	that this is me
dáid govaid	these images
ja	and
vaikko mot rievदान	however I change
dat govat, govat mus,	the images, images of me,
vai mungo	or I myself

The imprecise borders between the poet's self and the images that prophesy or reminisce enable the shaman to pass beyond time and place to interpret what he sees there. The voices he hears are as ambiguous as the images and dreams he seeks. The voices are:

girjái	ambiguous
govvái govadas, girjjat	like an image, emblem, figure
	(Poem 558d)

Despite the creative strain of the shaman's trance, despite the burden of the histories and prophecies the shaman must bear, there is still delight in the poet's voice, when he warmly intones "Beaivi, mu čalmmiin / the sun, in my eyes": "was it recently / I felt arms embracing, the warm lap, me too / the sun, in my eyes / no in my head, in my mind" (558d).

In this last long poem, the poet leaves no doubt about the importance of words, images, dreams and yoiks:

dát niegut, sáhtáše Leahkit	these dreams, could have been
dát govat, govaid luodit, luđiid govat	these images, the yoiks of the images,
	the images of the yoiks
ja jus báhcet	and if they are left behind
aktege goassege manin	anyone ever,
	for some reason
soames nu jalla	someone that silly

sárgon geađgái gárrái áibmui iežasii	inscribed in stone on the drum
	in the air to itself
luđiid, vuoimmálaš sániid,	yoiks, powerful words,
sáanaláš vuoimmi	word power
govva, govaid	image, the symbolic
govadas	imagery

(Poem 558g)

While the images and voices the poet-shaman sees and hears may be ambiguous, there is no ambivalence in the poet's conviction that these images, these dreams, these yoiks are powerful human expressions. No matter how ephemeral, they are potent emblems of life itself, written both on the drum and on the land.

### **Meaddel áiggiid: Beyond time and place**

*When a Westerner is born, he or she enters a stream of time that is always flowing. When a point in life is passed, it is finished. When a Westerner dies, he leaves the stream, which flows on without him. But for us [native Africans], birth plunges us into a pool in which the waters of past, present, and future swirl around together. Things happen and are done with, but they are not dead. After we splash about a bit in this life, our mortal beings leave the pool, but our spirits remain.*

(Makeba 2)

*In terms of an ecological world-view the hierarchy of the ecosphere must be seen as displaying a single spatio-temporal order. Vernacular man knew this.... [W]hile for us the order of nature is one thing, and the social order is another, to the Australian (aborigine) they are part of a single order—as indeed they were, for all traditional peoples who were imbued with the chthonic world-view.*

(Goldsmith 8)

*For the archaic mind humankind has no task higher than to live in an eternal mythical present, maintaining through ritual the sacrality and*

*timeless harmonies of natural existence. The Judeo-Christian mind claims nothing from nature. God alone is of importance, and human attention shifts irreversibly from any idea of an eternal mythical present to the hopeful awaiting of the future. For the Christian, time has two poles: the beginning (as depicted in Genesis I) and the end (the Day of Judgment, when the dead shall rise).*

(Oelschlager 65–6)

In "The Sun, the Thunder, the Fires of Heaven," Valkeapää contrasts Western linear time and individualization with natural aesthetics honoring what is beautiful in nature, and what is self-sufficient in life. He places in aesthetic opposition Western geometric images with natural shapes, such as the fell or a wave. Valkeapää emphasizes the innate and self-sufficient qualities of culture, as opposed to the specialization and alienation of Western culture.

Time is an element in native culture and literature that differs radically from time in western culture and literature. Paula Gunn Allen suggests that the alienation dominant in western literature can be attributed to the psychic fragmentation of industrial time as opposed to the psychic integration of ceremonial time. (*Hoop*, 150) She contends that tribal time (that is, native understandings of time in a traditional context) and space are fluid.

The traditional tribal concept of time is of timelessness, as the concept of space is of multidimensionality. In the ceremonial world the tribes inhabit, time and space are mythic ... [I]f you held time constant, space went to infinity, and when space was held constant, time moved to infinity. That was why it was not possible to determine the exact location of a particle on a grid. The tribal sense of self as a moving event within a moving universe is very similar to the physicists' understanding of the particle within time and space. There is plenty of time in the Indian universe because everything moves in a dynamic equilibrium and the fact of universal movement is taken into account in the ritual life that is tribal existence. (Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 147)

In the same way that place is understood quite differently for native peoples, time also reveals itself in different ways for place-particular



peoples. For most natives, time is not a linear concept, but a relational one, based on a notion that all things are imbued with spirit, and are thus related. Leroy Little Bear, a Blackfoot Indian who has led the Native American Program at Harvard University, puts it very clearly in his examination of "Jagged Worldviews Colliding":

The idea of all things being in constant motion or flux leads to a holistic and cyclical view of the world. If everything is constantly moving and changing, then one has to look at the whole to begin to see patterns. For instance, the cosmic cycles are in constant motion, but they have regular patterns that result in recurrences such as the seasons of the year, the migration of the animals, renewal ceremonies, songs, and stories. Constant motion, as manifested in cyclical or repetitive patterns, emphasizes process as opposed to product. It results in a concept of time that is dynamic but without motion. Time is part of the constant flux but goes nowhere. Time just is. (78)

Edmund Carpenter confirms a relational, rather than linear sense of time in his thoughts about Aivilik time and space in his book, *Eskimo Realities*:

I think the explanation for this phenomenon [of mechanical aptitude] lies in the over-all picture of Aivilik time/space orientation. At least three factors are involved: first, Aivilik do not conceptually separate space and time, but see the situation or machine as a dynamic process; second, they are acute observers of details; and third, their concept of space is not one of static enclosure, such as a room with sides or boundaries, but as direction, in operation. (26)

Time is many things, depending on who is using it. Among the Aivilik, there are no standard units of time (Carpenter). It may measure and mark our days, as it does to time-conscious, sound-bite-driven Westerners. Or it may be the mark of something "beyond time." In Poem 21 of *Beaivi, Áhčážan*, the poet declares that time is marked step by step, inexorably linking time to place in the newness of morning:

<i>lávkki</i>	<i>one step</i>
<i>nuppi</i>	<i>another</i>
<i>beaivi</i>	<i>day (literally, a sun)</i>
<i>jándor</i>	<i>day and night</i>
<i>vahkku</i>	<i>week</i>
<i>mánnu</i>	<i>month (literally, a moon)</i>
<i>jahki</i>	<i>year</i>

The link between time and place is not incidental. According to Klemetti Näkkäljärvi in his analysis of "The Natural Environment of Reindeer-Herding Sámi," "The principal division of reindeer lands corresponds to the principal divisions of the year into the 'summerside' ('*geassebealli*') and the 'winterside' ('*dálvebealli*'). Usually, northern (higher) and southern (lower) are the principal divisions of land." (148, translation by Dana) In fact, time is land-bound, if anything, among the reindeer herders:

[I]n the free pasture system, a herdsman looks after the reindeer in the early autumn, winter, and spring. In the autumn the reindeer are gathered, in the winter they are observed, and in the spring they are measured. Only in the summer months do they roam free. Since reindeer tend to remain in a certain location, the herder is able to find them come autumn. (Volkov, 19, as cited in Robinson, 92)

Time may just be, simply, without beginning, without ending, as Valkeapää declares in Poem 566, a meditation on time and place. The poem graphically recalls a flight of migrating birds, guiding the reader from the beginning without beginning to the end without end. Despite the very good translation here, the synthetic, poetic features of the Sámi language are easily lost in English, with its analytical, word-driven syntax. The English version lapses easily into words of one or two syllables, whereas in the Sámi original, the first half of the poem is driven by multi-syllable words, multi-word lines, and ends with a series of single, multi-syllable words. The effect in Sámi is that the first half of the poem has a stronger tempo than the latter half (Hirvonen, "Aurinko," 45–6), an effect that is diminished in the simpler words in the English translation.

566. <i>iige áigi leat, eai geažit, eai</i>	<i>and time does not exist, no end, none</i>
<i>ja áigi lea, agálaččat, álo, lea</i>	<i>and time is, eternal, always, is</i>
<i>loktana, luoitá</i>	<i>rises, falls</i>
<i>jápmá, riegáda</i>	<i>is born, dies</i>
<i>nu,</i>	<i>thus,</i>
<i>jorbbodit jándorat jagit</i>	<i>days, years are rounded</i>
<i>muohttagat suddet</i>	<i>snow melts</i>
<i>luotkanit urbbit</i>	<i>buds swell</i>
<i>ollána eallima rávdnji</i>	<i>the river of life</i>
<i>oallása</i>	<i>in deep pools of motion</i>
<i>johtolat váimmuid</i>	<i>the trek in the heart</i>
<i>duovdagiin</i>	<i>land</i>
<i>jollá</i>	<i>rounded off</i>
<i>eallima gierdu</i>	<i>life's circle</i>
<i>áiggihaga</i>	<i>infinite</i>
<i>álgguhaga</i>	<i>without beginning</i>
<i>loahpahaga</i>	<i>without ending</i>
<i>ollašuvvá</i>	<i>fulfills</i>
<i>iežáhuvvá</i>	<i>changes</i>
<i>girjjohallá</i>	<i>colors</i>
<i>eallin</i>	<i>life</i>

The recurring cycle of life for the Sámi occurs both in the "river of life" and in "the trek in the heart," both in place and in time. *Beaivi, Áhčážan* operates on many levels, but the unifying theme throughout is the mythic cycle, simultaneously invoking a distant spiritual past and documenting a historical near past. The Sámi conception of time is central to an understanding of the overall cycle, and that concept is firmly established in the beginning sequences of the book, and reinforced throughout the cycle.

### Sámi worldviews and the govadas-image drum

From prehistoric times, the govadas-image drum and the juoigan-song tradition have been central features of Sámi cultural life, particularly as embodied in the ritual practices of shamanism. Juha Pentikäinen, in his introduction to *Shamanism and Northern Ecology*, explains how the Sámi drum embodies Sámi worldviews. He considers shamanism to be a "grammar of mind" (10), because shamans need to be experts in the folklore of their cultures (11).

I would add that knowledge of the accompanying rituals would also be important to a successful shaman. Sámi shaman drums were the most visible emblems of shamanic knowledge, representing visibly the knowledge the Sámi shaman possesses.

The Saami [sic] drum is particularly complex in its structure, representing in its microcosm the seasonal variation of universe as a macrocosm. Containing much mythical information, it is a kind of cognitive map for the trip of the shaman's egosoul between the three levels of the universe. (Pentikäinen, 9)

Áillohaš constructs his shamanic role very deliberately throughout *Beaivi, Áhčážan*. His poems reflect not only the Sámi cosmology represented on the *govadas*-image drum, but also a deep understanding of the rituals that sustained Sámi culture. For instance, early in the second cycle of poems (Poems 11–23, in a cycle I have captioned "The Deities"), the shaman-poet names the elements of morning-spring that awake sensation and emotion. In Poem 20, he equates the world of thoughts with the moon and stars.

20. *jurdagiid máilbmi*      *the world of thoughts*  
*mánnu*                      *moon*  
*ja almmínástit*          *and stars*

He calls out the proper names of "Sun Eye / Sun Sister / Sun Daughter" ("Beaivečalbmi / Beaivvášoabba / Beaivvásnieida"), and revels in the spring they have created with his earthly brothers and sisters:

*gea vieljažan*                      *look my brother*  
*oabbá, oappážan*                *sister, my sister*

*giđđa!**spring!*

In a poetry that uses very little proper attribution or punctuation, Áillohaš's use of capital letters to name the Sun Women, and his use of an exclamation point to emphasize the wonder of "*spring!*" adds emphasis to his own delight. And the final verse of Poem 20 goes right to the heart of Sámi ritual, recognizing that the sacrifice of a white reindeer, or one marked as white with white thread (Westman 45–6, citing Rheen, Skanke, Forbus, and Kildal, earlier Lappologists), clears the pathway to the sun and makes possible all this intercourse among the Sámi kin — birds, animals, stones, fells, brothers and sisters, sun, moon, and stars. Spring is the time of sacrifice, when a white reindeer is sacrificed to show the way to the sun for the sons and daughters of the Sun. The sacrifice assures there is "a white thread / in the right ear," which will clear "a path / to the sun." Knowing the sacrifice ritual, Áillohaš writes simply:

*vilges láigi**a white thread**olgešbealljái**in the right ear**johtolahkan**a path**beaivvadáhkki**to the sun*

In a poem of remarkable compression, the poet rejoices in springtime by invoking the Sun Women and by the merest mention of a white thread that stands as the means to travel to "The Sun, My Father."

Similarly, the image drum serves simultaneously as instrument for shamanic journeying, as cognitive and mythical map, and as a symbol of repression, since the overarching shamanic tradition was fiercely repressed with the advance of Protestantism in the seventeenth century in northern Scandinavia. Sámi *govadasat*-drums were confiscated and broken by the authorities, and public *juoigat* were repressed. In his examination of this period, *The End of Drum-Time: Religious Change Among the Lule Saami, 1670s–1740s*, Håkan Rydving writes about the concealment of drums:

What the clergymen and many of the Sámis did not know, was that in addition to the enculturative and deculturative processes, there was also a process of concealment. Sámis who continued to practice

indigenous religious customs made a point of hiding them from the clergymen and from Sámis they did not trust. (167)

As a result of the repression of shamanism among the Sámi, these ritual traditions went deep underground; *govadasat* were hidden in remote, sacred places, and *juoigat* became intensely private, encoded language, scrutable only to initiates in Sámi language and culture. Writing about the existence of parallel sacred spaces for the Sámi, Rydving says that "Since the Christian sacred places were few and the indigenous sacrificial sites lay far away from them... the ritual spaces of the two religions could function side by side in the area (101)." Despite later Sámi acceptance of the ultra-conservative and evangelical Protestant sect of Laestadianism (cf. Minde, "Constructing 'Laestadianism': A case for Sami survival?"), both *govadas* and *juoigan* — both drum and song — have persisted as indelible and subversive emblems and avenues of Sámi culture.

A compelling definition of this secret, sacred *juoigan* language is in the lyric by Sámi poet Paulus Utsi (1918–75), "The Yoik":

The yoik is a sanctuary for our thoughts

Therefore it has

few spoken words

Free sounds reach

farther than words

The yoik lifts our spirit

allows our thoughts to soar

above the little clouds

has them

as its friends

in nature's beauty

(Gaski, *In the Shadow* 112)

Utsi, the first Sámi poet really recognized as an individual poet, spoke clearly for younger Sámi involved in the protest movements of the 1970s, and his little poem resembles a yoik itself. It has "few spoken words," but has a clear affinity with nature. In nature, the yoik transports thoughts "above the little clouds," where they will be safe and cherished. His poem is itself a kind of secret yoik, but made visible to Western readers through translation, in this case.

In Áillohaš's poetry, these twin Sámi cultural traditions of drum and song are both visible and invisible. The poet publicly declares his mythic *Beaivi*, *Áhčážan* to be an image drum itself, thus creating a postmodern metaphor out of a premodern tradition. The title — *The Sun, My Father* — alludes to the core story of Sámi mythology, *The Sons of the Sun* (Hirvonen, "Aurinko", 39), doubling the mythic reverberations central to the *noaidi*-shaman tradition, and harking back to the creation myth of the Sámi, the source of Sámi identity emblazoned on the landscape of the European North.

In the Sámi recorded version of *Beaivi*, *Áhčážan*, the poet reads his poems, accompanied by many yoiks, and soundtracks including contemporary musical instruments and recordings of nature sounds, such as birds' voices or the voice of the wind. The combined effect of the Sámi book-cum-drawings-cum-photographs-cum-reading-cum-music-&-natural-soundtrack is to create a work of deep, complex significance to those schooled in Sámi traditions, but more remote of access and more difficult of full interpretation to the non-initiate. The poet has himself repressed this complexity in the translations, which do not include the photographic images and are not accompanied by the literal soundtrack. According to the poet, the photographs are intended exclusively for the Sámi — for the exclusive use of the Sámi family (Hirvonen, "Aurinko", 38). Thus, the double entendre of using forbidden magic and concealing that magic from his foreign readers is made manifest.

In the introduction to *Aurinko, isäni*, the Finnish translation of *Beaivi*, *Áhčážan*, Nils-Aslak Valkeapää discusses his meanings and motives in allowing a translation of his work. In authorizing the translation, Valkeapää was considering how a Finnish version might make the Sámi original more accessible to fellow Sámi who are not necessarily fully literate in their own language, but have been educated in Finnish

schools, and are fully literate in Finnish. The Finnish translation is meant as a guide to readers who cannot access the Sámi original.

*Kuvahinen*. Teoksessa *Beaivi, Áhčážan* — tai oikeastaan visuaalis-verbaalissa eepoksessa, kuvahisessa — kuvat ja runot luovat yhdessä hengittävän kokonaisuuden. Suomenkielinen käänös on tarkoitettu apuneuvoksi matkalle kuvahisen alusta sen loppuun. Teos aukeaa eri tavoin eri lukijoille, mutta kaikille se nousee askel askeleelta eteneväksi matkaksi tuntureiden elämään, myös pelkkänä tekstinä ilman kuvia. (introduction, n.p.)

[*Govadas — the image drum*. In the work *Beaivi, Áhčážan* — or rather in this visual verbal epic, in this image drum — the images and poems together create a breathing, living whole. The Finnish-language translation is intended as a guide to the *govadas* from its beginning to its end. The work reveals itself in different ways to different readers, but for all it rises step by step as a journey into the life of the high fells, even as plain text without images. (Translation from the Finnish by Dana)]

Nonetheless, the pictures remain accessible to any Sámi, who may not be able to read the poems in their mother tongue. And the soundtrack, with its vast repertoire of yoiks and natural sounds, remain accessible to the larger Sámi family, which is intimately familiar with the yoik tradition and deeply experienced with the sounds of the high fells. Thus, while a Westerner is constrained to read the English version as text, Sámi — or other privileged readers — can access the poetry through image, sound, and word. The intertextuality of *Beaivi, Áhčážan* is central to the artist's intentions, yet intentionally suppressed in the Western versions. Thus, the shaman-poet simultaneously conceals and celebrates the Sámi shaman tradition, adding a creative tension between concealment and celebration in his work.

*Govadasat* drums varied widely throughout Sápmi [cf. Ernst Manker's exhaustive catalog of Sámi drums, *Die lappische Zaubertrommel, I–II (Lappish Magic Drums)*]. Manker calls the *govadasat* "Zaubertrommel" or "magic drums," emphasizing their shamanic uses. I, however, prefer the term "image drum," which points to the symbolic and metaphoric uses of the *govadas*, and which points to the "govva-image" etymology of the word, since Valkeapää uses the drums



symbolically and metaphorically, as well as shamanistically, in his work.

Whether they were oval, frame drums, or smaller bowl drums carved from birch burls, the Sámi cosmography would be painted in alder bark ink on the drumhead, portraying the fundamental worldview of the Sámi — or the Sámi "cognitive map," as Juha Pentikäinen describes the *govadasat* ("The shamanic drum as cognitive map"). The number of figures and their placement in the *almmi*-heavens or *sáivomáilmmi*, the sacred ancestral mountain where the dead live a carefree life, vary throughout historical Sápmi, but all drums carefully map the gods, the people, and the creatures in a carefully intentioned ecology. (Cf. Odd Mathis Hætta, *The Ancient Religion and Folk-Beliefs of the Sámi*).

Juha Pentikäinen, in his *Saamelaiset: Pohjoisen kansan mytologia (The Sámi: Mythology of a Northern People)* emphasizes the importance of sacred places in the high fells from which a fine vista is available all around. Such sites were used as places of sacrifice, to represent the *sáivomáilmmi*, and as places to store *govadasat* drums and other shamanic paraphernalia (142–3). These sacred places are honored on the Sámi tradition, not only in practice, but also literally, such as *Áilegas* near Ohcejohka, *Nuvvos-Áilegas* on the Deatnu River, or *Áiligas* near Karigasniemi, both on the Finland side of the Deatnu River. The concept of sacredness is found in many variants of the North Sámi word *áiligas* (*áiles*, *áilis* < *helig*, Swedish < *heilig*, German; cf. *holy*, English).

Is it any wonder, then, that the poet is also called *Áillohaš*, with etymological pointers to these sacred places? Through his very careful selection of images and words, *Áillohaš* has very clearly constructed intentional cultural worlds, invoking the Sámi shamanic past and intimating a possible, if fleeting effect of Sámi worldviews on the world at large. As the poet, he assumes the shaman's role of divining both the past and the future. His poems of prophecy are especially compelling in the last section of *Beaivi*, *Áhcážan* (Poems 451–511), where he struggles with ideas of good and evil and the shaman's fleeting role in negotiating those worlds.

While drums and worldviews are as varied among groups of Sámi as Sámi dialects vary from one another, there are nonetheless common

features among the worldviews that appear across Sápmi, and Nils-Aslak Valkeapää has used image drums to frame and shape his poetry.

The metaphorical impact of the *Beaivi*, *Áhčážan* as the *govadas*-image drum of the shaman-poet is sustained in a similar manner throughout the entire 571 images and poems, complex with layers of meaning and intention. A look backward at Nils-Aslak Valkeapää's earlier autobiographical *Ruoktu váimmus* helps to show the evolution of Áillohaš's shamanic and poetic powers, particularly in his use of images and drums.

### **The Image Drum and *Trekways of the Wind***

In the lyrically designed autobiographical trilogy, *Ruoktu váimmus/Trekways of the Winds*, a number of *govadas* images also appear, including the trademark-like design for DAT, Valkeapää's publisher in Guovdageaidnu, Norway. For instance, the last section of the second cycle, *Lávullo vizar biellocizaš / Bluethroat, Twitter, Sing*, is a compelling flow of images similar to those often found on *govadasat*; symbolic animals swim or paddle along a stream of water which follows the bottoms of 26 pages beneath the poet's hymn of praise to "the life of the ancient Sámi" (166).

This pages-long stream of water stops at a drum-like image on page 192, which seems to show humans chained together in protest in the lower world, while sun-like images and flying beasts cavort through the upper sky. Over the next two pages, the images burst out of the drum frame and are scattered apocalyptically across a dizzying landscape. The images darken in the next two openings, with faceless *čude*-strangers crowding a ravaged landscape, a modern church teetering at the top of the page, while poisoned wildfowl stagger in agony at the foot.

But then, the images slip into black, and the poems reappear in quiet white letters against the stark black background. The recognition of fellow Sámi is comforting in its repetition: "I would know you / even if you were among others / you are my brother / you are my sister // I would know you / even if you were not wearing Sámi dress / You are my brother / you are my sister" (199).

The third cycle of *Ruoktu váimmus / Trekways of the Winds*, *Ádjaga silbasuonat / Silver Veins of Streams*, also culminates in a *govadas*-image

drum, which is placed at the juncture of ecumene and anecumene, addressing through images the confluence of the "wilderness" and "civilization" as viewed by a native artist. Fluid, penned lines of a Sámi homescape flow easily across the top of the page, accompanied by the poet's perceptions of the dysjunction between natural and cultural homescapes:

in the mind's restlessness  
my heart took my hand  
led me to see

accompanied by the tones of wind  
the home tundras speak  
the campsites known  
like a staff in the hand (277)

On the next page, the poet's image drum, framed by powerful reindeer antlers, sits in the airy distance, while the Sámi homescape lines shift and cross beneath it. Áillohaš speaks directly to his reader / lover / brother / sister, with an anxiously hopeful voice: "Before you left / the fall birds / gathered / day by day // Tomorrow / will the sun / be visible" (278). By the following page, the image has become a shocking, jagged technoscape of endless skyscrapers, while a faceless clock takes the place of the drum. The poet warns: "one alienated from nature / will not understand / that the bird must be killed / to remain in the hand" (279).

Beneath the dust jacket of *Ruoktu váimmus / Trekways of the Winds* with its brightly fluttering *gákti*-tunic hem, is a more sober blue cloth cover, with *govadas* images imprinted in silver, a sun on the front cover, and a sacrificial *sieidi*-site on the back cover. While *govadas* images lend substance and flair to *Ruoktu váimmus*, the more mythical *Beaivi*, *Áhčážan* is literally a drum, a *govadas*, an instrument which can reveal the past, the present, and the future, in all of the conceptual, intentional worlds of the Sámi from the *almmi*-heavens to the world beyond, or *sáivomáilmmi*. Áillohaš names his read version of the book a *jietnagovadas*, or "voice drum," further invoking the privileges of the

shaman to master symbol and meaning. The poet has moved from alluding to the Sámi shamanic past to employing it whole, deeply integrated into the shape and substance of *Beaivi, Áhčážan*.

### **Beaivi, Áhčážan as a literal image drum**

In both the original Sámi-language *Beaivi, Áhčážan* and in its translations, the actual drum appears on the blood-red, dawn-red covers. On the front cover is a full *govadas*, an image drum embossed in gold, with more than a dozen images or clusters of images circling a central sun, while on the back cover only the central image of the sun remains, its gilded rays and central cross enlarged and solitary against the bright, birth-red color of the book's binding. These are but two of the many images of image drums that appear throughout the text.

The opening image, *6. govat govadasas* ("6. images on an image drum", Ernst Manker, *Die lappische Zaubertrommel II*), is a startlingly enlarged section from the top left quadrant of the image drum embossed on the cover. This quadrant is reproduced in white on glossy black paper, and the image transverses the central page fold of the book. Turning this page brings us to the opening sequence of text, Poem 7, again in white letters on black paper. The sun radiates in the upper left corner and a pair of randy reindeer from the image drum of the blood-red cover sprint across the tops of the pages.

The opening poem, Poem 7, starts with a long, prayerful incantation of "a's." In the English translation, "o's" replace the "a's," but the sense of the poet's meaning is less a rapturous "oh!," than a quiet, welcoming, "ah...," a sound that is repeated in the few words of the opening sequence:

aaa  
aaaaa aa aaaaa  
aaaaaaaaaiivaaaaaannn aaaaaainnnnuuuht

[ooo  
ooooo oo ooooo  
oooooooooriigiinaaaaaal oooooooooooooonlyyyy]

When the poem shifts to readily recognizable words on the next page, the poet as shaman starts: "*humahalan eatnama / meaddel áiggiid*" ("I converse with the earth / beyond time"), to hear the voices of "*The sun / the world's father / The earth / life's mother*". Significantly, the shaman-poet converses in the first person, linking the personal and the cosmic/mythic through shamanistic ritual.

This opening sequence of *Beaivi, Áhčážan* might be considered a variant of the creation story, with its invocation of the cosmic father and earthly mother, and with its catalog of earthly beings. Valkeapää's creation story simply calls into being a world that already exists "beyond time."

Note how distinct this worldview is from the Biblical Christian worldview, where creation takes place out of a darkened void, "in the beginning" (Genesis I, 1–2). In the Christian version there is a literal beginning, while in the Sámi version there is a magical recognition of something already existing "*meaddel áiggiid*" / "*beyond time.*"

This first poem is a birth poem, with the poet speaking to the earth "*meaddal áiggiid / beyond time,*" after which the dim outlines of a tremendous *sieidi*-site loom majestically in a dim, scratched photo of Sejt-jaur on the Kola Peninsula. Close-up photos of powerful, human-like *sieidi* rock formations complete the images (Photos 8–10) before the poet continues with his prayers to the earthly powers, the *Beaivi, Áhčážan*-Sun, father (esp. Poem 7), the *Eanan, eadni*/ Earth, mother, and the *biegga*-wind (Poem 12).

Such close kinship with natural elements is not unusual in native traditions. This concept of closeness, of living with the rest of nature, as part of nature, is a tremendously comforting concept, as in this lovely Laguna Pueblo lullaby, which concludes Leslie Marmon Silko's sad story of old age and cultural decline, "Lullaby":

*The earth is your mother,*

*she holds you.*

*The sky is your father,*

*he protects you.*

*Sleep,*

*sleep.*

*Áillohaš and his image drum*

*Rainbow is your sister,  
she loves you.  
The winds are your brothers,  
they sing to you.  
Sleep,  
sleep.  
We are together always  
We are together always  
There never was a time  
when this  
was not so.*

(Silko, *Storyteller*, 51)

To perceive the celestial as paternal and the earthly as maternal, the winds and seasons as brothers and sisters is at the heart of a worldview that does not separate nature and culture, for which perception and experience, metaphor and significance exist in an intimacy that is only marginally known in Western worldviews.

For the Sámi, this native worldview is expressed in its totality in the *govat*-images, which endow their drums with their magic. Thus, when Áillohaš acknowledges human expression in Poems 22 and 23, those poems are framed — literally framed — by *govadasat* images.

*juoiggadeimmet / illudeimmet / vizardeimmet*

[*we yoiked / we rejoiced / we sang like birds* (Poem 23)]

The first cycle of *Beaivi, Áhčážan* relates the elements of creation, greeting *Beaivi, Áhčážan* — "Sun, my Father" — and *Eanan, eallima eadni* — "Earth, Mother of Life" (Poem 7). The next cycle names the other kin of creation, including *biegga*, the wind. In the third cycle, in Poem 34, the poet names the conceptual worlds of the Sámi in the overture, and catalogues the real creatures of its ecology in a litany of recognition. Like the book itself in its image-drum guise, many of Áillohaš's poems in *Beaivi, Áhčážan* are literal representations of meaning, with their layout symbolic of relationships, like the images on the drumhead:

34. sárggun

I inscribe

almmi

heaven

ja almmimearkkaid

and heavenly signs

sáivomáilmmi

and the world beyond

ja

and

lehkos ealli,

let there be life

rieбан

fox

návdi

wolf

bierdna

bear

čeavrris

otter

buoidda

ermine

njoammil

hare

rávdu

char

dápmot

trout

čuovža

grayling

bálddis

halibut

bossu

whale

bižus

golden plover

láful

dotterel

čuonja

goose

njukča

swan

beahceloddi muorrageahčái

game bird in a treetop

skáhpi

rowan tree

siedga

osier

suhpi

aspen

soahki

birch

Significantly, the poet takes responsibility for calling his world into being. He says that he "inscribes" this world, referring both to the creative process of painting a drumhead in alder juices and to the magical process of being the shaman-poet who knows his world and can name the creatures in it. In naming the creatures and plants of the Sámi world, Áillohaš intentionally classifies them, zigzagging from the larger mammals (*rieban*-fox, *návdi*- wolf, *bierdna*-bear) to the smaller fur-bearing mammals (*čeaorris*-otter, *buoidda*-ermine, *njoammil*-hare); from the freshwater fishes (*rávdu*-char, *dápmot*-trout, *čuovža*-grayling) to the saltwater fishes and the whale (*bálldis*-halibut, *bossu*-whale); from the birds of the air (*bižus*-golden plover, *láful*-dotterel, *čuonja*-goose, *njukča*-swan) to a "game bird in a treetop" (*beacheloddi muorrageahčái*) to the trees themselves (*skáhpi*-rowan tree, *siedga*-osier, *suhpi*-aspen, *soahki*-birch).

Images 24–28 are Valkeapää's own photos of rock carvings from Jiepmaluokta, followed by museum photos of the front and back of a "tambour chamanique", a *govadas* in the collection of Prince Roland Bonaparte (1884, Musée de l'Homme, Paris). The back shows the cross construction of the frame drum hung with talismans, the T-shaped antler drumstick neatly stowed. The front of the drum, with its shades of light and dark, almost throbs with the potential of the mystical figures on its face. These images contrast dramatically with the corresponding drum at the end of the volume, its drumhead brutally slashed.

Image 564 of a Sámi skeleton in a coffin from the Ethnographic Museum at the University of Oslo, the blurred and darkened *sieidi* in Image 568, and the curious petroglyphs of humans in Image 571, their arms upraised in surrender or despair or jubilation, emphasize the invasive nature of the Prince's collecting journey to Sápmi in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the ambivalent situation of Sámi culture at the end of the twentieth.

## **Conclusion**

When the reader sits with *Beaivi*, *Áhčážan* in hand, listening to the poet's gentle, yet insistent voice read his poems to the accompaniment of yoiks and other nature sounds, one has the very experience of being in the high fells and witnessing a powerful shaman define his world



and then plunge, trance-like, into its depths to find meaning in his own life and meaning for the Sámi nation and meaning for the world at large. Nils-Aslak Valkeapää has not only made an image drum, but he is also a powerfully adroit shaman-poet who knows how to use natural and native symbols to see into the past and into the future. His work refers obliquely to his shamanic powers, and in an act of poetic resistance, he has created books of poetry that are image drums of the postmodern era for his people.

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