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ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЕ КУЛЬТУР
В ДРЕВНОСТИ И СРЕДНЕВЕКОВЬЕ

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INTERACTION OF CULTURES
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SWING IN THE KOMI CALENDAR RITES

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To swing during early spring is the ancient traditions of many peoples, including the Finno-Ugric ones. There was the proposal in ethnographic literature, repeated more than once, that in the past swing was magic measure for increasing land fertility; and process of swinging symbolized the awakening of Nature. In this connection, erotic character of swing songs and games seems not to be sporadic. Rhythmical motion of swing by itself is enough transparent metaphor of coupling.

Swing was favourite amusement of rural Komi youth during spring and summer, beginning from Shrovetide. On the eve of the festival householders usually hanged rope swing ("сеник гыдсаи" or "вент гыдсан") in shed or porch. They were used mainly by little children or adolescents, but at the last day of Shrovetide ("йов вый дун") - Sunday - swing was only for unmarried youth. Children continued to swing on them up to the end of Petrov Fast, when haymaking began and sheds were full of grass (hay).

From the Shrovetide week up to the "Land Birthday" ("му ним дун"), i.e. the third day of Trinity, girls were fond of skipping on board - the so called "перескачка" or "чеччалом". Long supple board had been put across a block, and two girls stood on its both ends. Then they began to skip turn by turn, threw up each other. Other girls, wanted to skip too, stood near the board. Fellows, gathered around them, encouraged the girls to skip as high as possible the high jump the high lift of girl's skirt of saraphan... Such an exercising needs much skill and exactness, because it is very difficult to touch down on the end of board by both legs and not to fall from it. If one leg slides down the land, a girl must give her place to another "skipper".

All groups of the Komi people made big swing on open air during the Easter. According to traditions, the Easter swing had been made by unmarried fellows on the eve of "Light Sunday" ("Ыджыд дун"), moreover they tried to do it before dawn -- in order nobody could see the process of its setting up. The place for it was chosen at centre of settlement - near a church (correspondingly, near cemetery), or out of village -- on riverside meadows, where the youth usually had games in spring and summer. Sometimes nearly 10 big swing were made in one village (one can see this tradition in the village of Petrun', on the Usa river, up to nowadays). The Izhma reindeer-breeders made swing in tundra, used pine poles of chum frame as swing support. It took place only
when the Easter had been celebrated in the end of April, so the breeders couldn't go away from their herbs during migrations.

The Komi had two main types of big Easter swing:

1. On two supports with still cross-beam, on which a sitting-board was hanged by ropes or chains.
2. Swing as roundabout with cross, turn vertically, and fixed on two supports.

Usually supports for the first type of swing were made of fir poles, tied into two tripods, or of pine piles. Swing was also hanged up between two trees, as a rule, between pines or birches, grew by each other; or on a branch of perennial birch. Interesting variant of Easter swing was in the village of Objachevo on the Luza river: the swing was put on a meadow "Гажа ий" ("Jolly Place") near one-staying birch "Ыджыд Кыды" ("Big Birch"). This perennial birch was used as one of supports, second one was made of fir poles. Large swing, similar construction with North-Russian Easter one, was the most widely spread in the Komi region. In this case, every support was made of 3-4 fir or pine poles, which often were pulled out of removable fences; cross-beam was turn by skin to protect ropes from break; pine board was hanged up on ropes or chains (the board usually was taken from the floor of any shed. One can see the same construction in folklore of the Izlima Komi:

"...Раскачаем мы ходкую качель,  
Что на восьми прямых жердях,  
Раскачаем мы люльку четырехугольную..."

(We get a swing going well. The swing, which is staying on eight straight poles. We swing a cradle with four corners...).

According to tradition, hemp ropes for Easter swing were specially woven by girls of marriage age. The Letka Komi wove these ropes from supple stems of young birches or entwined branches with open leaves in ordinary rope.

Roundabouts ("паль потана качаль") were set, as a rule, in the centre of villages: four cradles were hanged up on vertically rotated cross-piece, moved with the help of simple mechanism. So, for example, one could see three such roundabouts in various places at the village of Krasnobar on the Izhma river, set up on Easter. All cradles were beautifully painted and, later, called on the names of masters, who had made and painted them: Оконь Вань потаи, Ларей Миш потаи, etc.

Only unmarried youth (older that 16) was permitted to sway on big Easter swing, moreover, they could do it only from midday till the twilight during all Easter week. Small children and adolescents swayed on rope swings, which had been hanged up at Srovetide. During Easter week adolescents often swayed on trees in birch groves near villages. A few boys climbed up a new high birch, swing it and bent the top to land. Then one of them caught on the top and began to swing up and down. As for girls,
they made "swings" on removable fences from poles, fixed horizontally, without telling the parents. In this case, lower poles were taken out of the fence, and the upper one was wound by saraphan skirt.

On big Easter swings the youth swayed in turn, layed down during various games. So, for example, the Letka Komi had the game, when swingers were given the pair of lapti, which were thrown from the swing (more concretely, at the moment of its high point) to the crowd near. Those, who caught lapti, became the next swinger.

If the board-sitting was enough, 10 persons were able to sit there at the same time: girls sat on the board, lifted skirts of their saraphans, and two fellows stood at the edge of it and put the swing in motion. Girls, got off the swing, must thank fellows with the kiss and words: "Christ revived!" Sometimes a girls should say the name of her beloved, only after it she could get off a swing. The Izhma and Inta Komi youth swung by couples - girl and fellow, who must kiss in the highest point of swing motion. Besides, everything around them cried: "Христос воскресен" (revive the Christ with the kiss); and didn't permit the couple to get off till they kissed. The Letka Komi often made swing near the haystack, where girls and fellows jumped in the highest point of swing motion.

In the past such participation in swing games during the Easter week, was not only amusement, but also the ritual examination for the youth of marriage age (as you may see above, children are forbidden to swing on big Easter swing). It is interesting to note, that swing in the Komi folklore describes as mortal examination for epic hero, set out in search of bride:

"Подошли мы к тем качелям...
под качелями лежат,
вытянувшись в страшный ряд,
кости сгнившие людские,
кости свежие людские...
Сами сразу мы подумали:
"Значит здесь они гостей
на качелях этих губят...

(We came to this swing and saw the terrible row of human fresh and rot bones. So, we thought that it is this place, where they ruined guests).

In this case, we may remember some reasons, why it is forbidden to swing on Easter swings after the Light Week. People say: "You may fall in resin pit" (According to Komi beliefs, the road to the other world passes through resin lake), or: "The Paradise gates are open only during the Easter week" (it is considered that souls of persons, died during the Easter week, get into the Paradise). We should mention that the Komi arrange commemorative feast on all died relatives for the Easter. In this context, one may make the process of swing stand in one row with another "leave-taking" rites of spring and summer cycle. The youth, participated in
swing games during the Easter week, played the role of mediators to the
other world for those, died during a year. In this case, we can apply the
swing motion on the axis East-West.

One may propose that construction of big Easter swing with its real
dynamic symbolically describes the dynamics of mythological model of
world creation -- the possibility to transfer from one world to another.
Secret rite of swing making, "erotic" swing games, probable,
symbolically reproduced the act of world creation through overcome the
border between "top" and "bottom". It is known, that Primary Time,
in accordance with mythic notions, is characterized by indivisibility of
land and sky: one of the Komi myths tells about the time when anybody
can touch the sky with hand. Final moment in mythological scenario of
world-creation may be compared with the last day of Easter week. This
day every participant of swing games presented coloured Easter eggs --
symbol of Revival to fellows, who had made the swings. The swings were
fully disassembled at this evening (recovery of the opposition top-
bottom), or only cradles and boards-seats were removed from it. In the
last case swing supports, which symbolize the idea of static integrity of
the universe, were stood during all year -- up to the next Easter.

On Vozneșenje the Komi people made swings look like roundabout on
one support: high pine post was rooted to land, its top was crowned with
a cross-piece, horizontally turned, and with ropes, fastened to it. Such
roundabout was called "гигантские шаги " (giant stride). Girls and
fellows, grasped the ends of the ropes, took their's run around the post and
tried to fly over the land as far as possible. Old residents of the village of
Otla on the river Vym' told that, when girls dressed in new saraphans,
goes around on such a swing, adolescents thrown them with row eggs of
wild birds. After that the girls went to meadows and turned head-over-
heels in a new grass in order to clean saraphans skirts. Probable, these
actions had ritual character and somehow were connected with fertility
magic.

One can guess the sun way in the round motion of swing on vertical and
horizontal axises. As ethnograph N.Konakov notes: "Swing is universal
symbol of cyclical time". According to traditional beliefs of many peoples,
pendulum rocking of swing-cradle-coffin is associated with
deathrevival. So, as a rule, swing making was timed to spring, when
solar action greatly increased. Moving on swing symbolized spring
awakening of nature and as if secured stability of universe rhythm.
Table "Swing in Traditional Komi Culture"
A - Shirana-kachaj, the village of Njashabozh, the Pechora-river
B - Shirana-kachaj, the village of Kipievo, the Pechora-river
C - Shirana-kachaj, the village of Petrun', the Usa-river
D - Sjuija-gydsan, the village of Spasporub, the Luza-river
E - Kachal', the village of Krasnobor, the Ishma-river
F - Gez-gydsan, the village of Gurjevka, the Letka-river
Table "Swing in Traditional Komi Culture"

G - Sjurja-gydsan, the village of Objachevo, the Luza-river
H - Gez-gydsan, the village of Mezhador, the Vizinga-river
I - Gez-gydsan
J - Senik-gydsan or vevt-gydsan
K - Nef-potana-kachal
L - "Giant stride" ("гигантские шаги")
КАЧЕЛИ В КАЛЕНДАРНОЙ ОБРЯДНОСТИ КОМИ

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Резюме

В этнографической литературе неоднократно высказывалось мнение о том, что в прошлом качели связывались с представлениями о плодородии земли, а раскачивание на качелях символизировало весеннее пробуждение природы.

В предлагаемой статье рассматриваются некоторые варианты традиционных качелей, характерных в прошлом для весенне-летней календарной обрядности различных этнографических групп коми. Анализ конструктивных особенностей качелей и некоторых качельных игр позволил сформулировать гипотезы, согласно которым:
- динамическая конструкция больших пасхальных качелей обусловлена мифопоэтическими представлениями о возможности перехода из одного мира в другой;
- в тайном ритуале сооружения качелей, а также в эротических качельных играх символически воспроизводился акт творения мировоздания.

Можно полагать, что рассмотрение мотива “раскачивания” является перспективным при характеристике мифологических представлений о динамических аспектах космо- и социогенеза.