

Poinamukaru niushpe ashinka shiri tinka

Alexander Akulov

independent scholar; Saint Petersburg, Russia; e-mail: aynu@inbox.ru

Abstract

Describing the Ainu of the Northern Kuril islands D. M. Pozdneev shows the following proverb: *poinamukaru niushpe ashinka shiri tinka*, and, according to Pozdneev, this saying means: "cutting a tree with a stone ax took great efforts". However, this translation shows just the general meaning, but doesn't express the precise meaning of the saying, and also the recording of the proverb is quite inaccurate. This proverb originally had the following view: *poyna mukar ni-us-pe asin-ke sir e-cin-ke* and its original meaning is the following: "to cut a tree [with] a stone ax is [as difficult as] to stretch land like a skin of an animal".

Keywords: Ainu; Ainu of the Northern Kuril islands; Kuril Ainu; Ainu language; Kuril islands

1. Introduction to the problem

Describing the Ainu of the Northern Kuril islands D. M. Pozdneev writes the following:

Regarding the stone tools Ainu of the Northern Kuril islands say that in ancient times when there was no iron yet, tools were made of stone, and only two different types of stone: 1 / stone axes "poinamukaru" (poi = stone, mukaru = axe), of the so-called esyuen stone, and 2/ stone arrowheads anziai (anzi = kind of stone, agate, ai = arrowhead). Unfortunately, the manufacturing of these stone utensils is now forgotten, but the Ainu of the Northern Kuril Islands still have an amazing proverb of that time, which they say after the end of a hard work: "Poinamukaru niushpe ashinka shiri tinka", which means: "cutting a tree with a stone ax took great efforts" (Pozdneev 1909: 52)

This fragment is a significant source about Ainu (late Jōmon) stone industry: Ainu of the Northern Kuril islands maintained the technologies of the Jōmon period (manufacturing of stone tools and ceramics) till at least the middle of the 19th century.

And this fragment is also a significant source about the dialect of Kuril Ainu.

There are some inaccuracies in this fragment.

The word for "stone" in Kuril Ainu isn't *poi*, as it is suggested by Pozdneev, but *pojna* (see Radłński 1891: 104), in Modern Ainu orthography *pojna* has become *poyna*.

Also, there are serious doubts that the word *anzi* (this *anzi* originally probably was *anci*) means "agate" since the Ainu of the Northern Kuril islands didn't manufacture arrowheads of agate; the primary raw materials for manufacturing arrowheads were flint and obsidian, but not agate. The recording of the proverb shown by Pozdneev is quite inaccurate, and also the translation given by Pozdneev shows just the meaning in general, but doesn't express the precise meaning

of the saying. And therefore, in this paper I want to restore the initial view of this saying and give a precise translation of its original meaning.

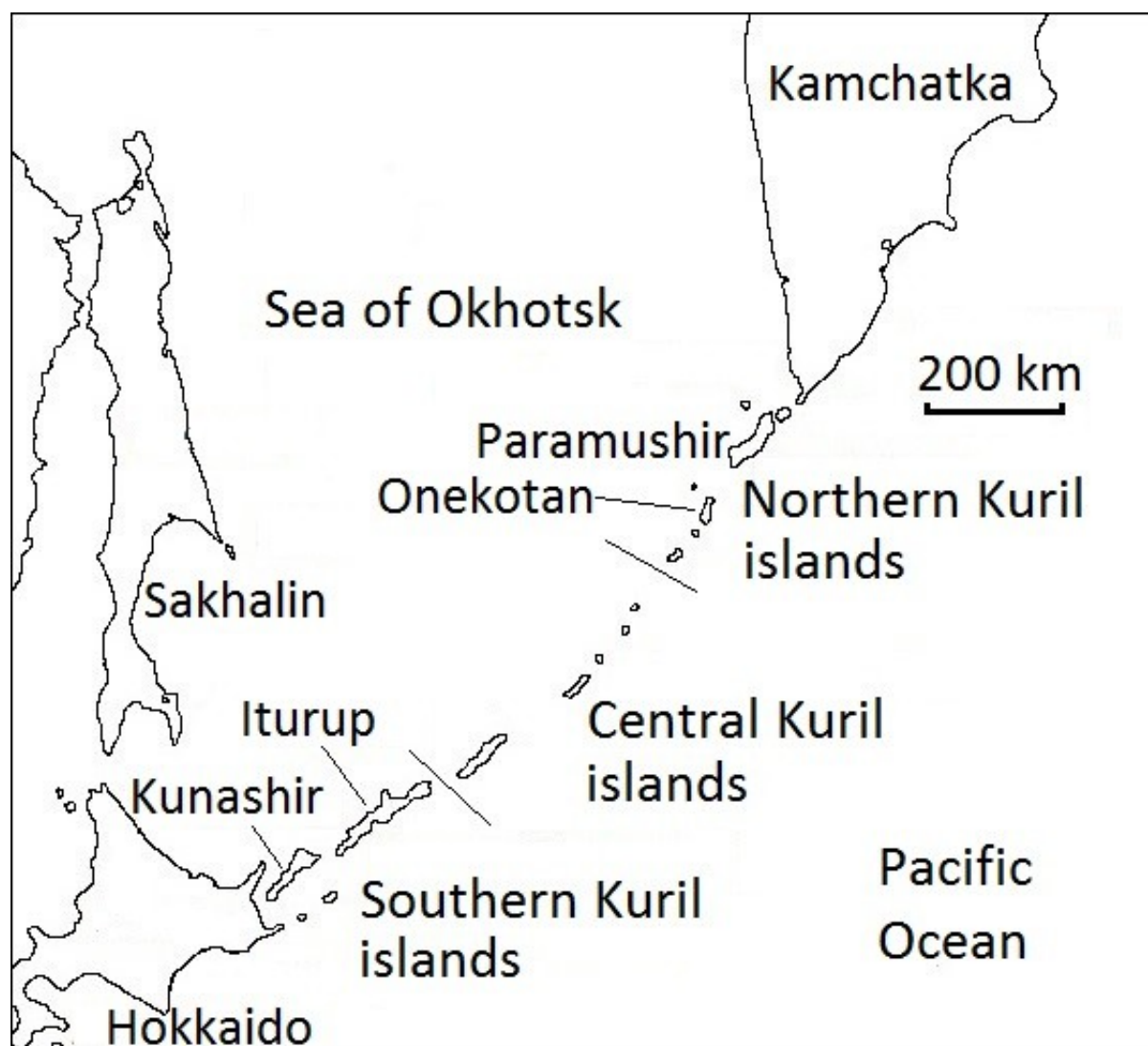


Fig. 1. Kuril islands (drawn by the author)

2. The original view of the proverb and its translation

Let's now analyze the saying *poinamukaru niushpe ashinka shiri tinka* in a detailed way.

The word-form *poinamukaru* really is a compound of the following words: *poyna*¹ "stone", and *mukar* means "ax" (Kayano 2005: 428).

The word-form *niushpe* is a compound of the following morphemes: *ni* "tree", "firewood" (Kayano 2005: 341), *us* is a verb that means "to be [made] of [something]" or "to have the

¹ In the word list of the Kuril dialect compiled by S.P. Krasheninnikov this word is recorded as *поина* [poina] (Krasheninnikov 1994: 185), and in the dictionary of the Kuril dialect compiled by B. Dybowsky this word is recorded as *pojna* [pojna] (Radlírski 1891: 104).

property of something”² (see Ōta 2005: 238), and *pe* is a nominalizer meaning “thing” or “being” (Kayano 2005: 395). Thus, *ni-us-pe* literally means “wooden item”.

The word-form of *ashinka* correlates with *asin-ke*³ “to pull out” (Ōta 2005: 9) “to root out”, “to pluck out” (Batchelor 1905: 49); the root of the word-form is *asin* “to go out”, “to go outside” (Ōta 2005: 9), and *-ke* is a marker of causative (Nonno 2015: 14).

The word-form *shiri* correlates with *sir* “land”, “island” (Kayano 2005: 273).

And the word-form *tinka* originally was *cin-ke*.

Here should be taken into account the fact that in Ainu the [ts] sound is actually a variant of [t] and often can be recorded as t. And also in this word-form took place the same distortion as in the case of *asinke*, i.e.: [e] was recorded as [a].

The root of this word-form is *cin* that means “to stretch a skin of an animal on a frame” (Kayano 2005: 319; Ōta 2005: 20), this procedure was done in order to dry the skin of an animal in a properly (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Deer skins stretched on frames (image source – Klek 2022)

² According to Batchelor, this word is used as an adjectival ending to some nouns, e.g.: *upas-ush* “snowy” (in Modern Ainu orthography: *upas-us*), or *upar-ush* “sooty” (in Modern Ainu orthography *upar-us*) (Batchelor 1905: 485 – 486), *upas* means “snow” and *upar* means “soot”.

³ In early recordings of the Ainu language the [e] sound was sometimes recorded as [a], for instance, the original Ainu name of the Kunashir island was *Kunne-sir* “Black island”.

The word-form *cin-ke* is a causative of *cin*, the structure of this *cin-ke* is the following:

∅=∅=cin-ke

3sg.agent=3sg.patient=stretch/expand-CAUS.

This *cin-ke* literally means “to make somebody/something to stretch/expand the land like a skin of an animal on a frame” also this word-form can be translated as “to stretch land by something”.

And thus, summarizing all the above-said, it is possible to say that the saying *poinamukaru niushpe ashinka shiri tinka* originally had the following view: *poyna mukar ni-us-pe asin-ke sir e-cin-ke* and its original meaning is the following: “to cut a tree [with] a stone ax is [as difficult as] to stretch land like a skin of an animal”.

All auxiliaries words that are used in a usual sentence, like, for instance, the instrumental particle *ani*, are omitted in this sentence, so that the phrase to be more laconic and to be better organized rhythmically as it befits proverbs and sayings. The phrase is organized by the rhyme *asinke – cinke*.

Proverbs and folklore narratives are the means that allow us to see the world view of Ainu. As far as we have no folklore of the Kuril Ainu, but have only some sayings, so the saying, considered in the current paper, is a very important source on the world view of the Kuril Ainu, it allows us to see the images and metaphors that were used by the Kuril Ainu to describe and comprehend the world.

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