



INTRODUCTION: FAMILY AND CLAN¹

[1–3; 1–4; 129–131; 60–62]²

THE STRUCTURE of the Gilyak family and the norms of their sexual relations seem on superficial acquaintance to be so simple and so similar to our own that they mislead even a serious observer. The famous Academician Leopold von Schrenck lived with the Gilyak for more than 2 years and left us his well-known multivolume monograph on that tribe.³ Yet he was firmly convinced that the Gilyak family belonged to the normal patriarchal type, and he countered the opinion of Phillipp Franz von Siebold, who, following the reports of Mamiya Rinzo [1776–1844], a Japanese traveler of the 18th century, asserted that, “The northwest coast of Sakhalin (that is, Gilyak territory), is the only part of the world where by force of law or custom polyandry is practiced.”⁴ Von Schrenck regarded his own presentation of the facts as unquestionably correct. Not being able fully to accept the accuracy of Mamiya Rinzo’s communications in general and believing him to be an excellent observer, von Schrenck could but attribute the statement about the polyandric practices of the Gilyak to the

¹ [**Editor’s note:** Although the AMNH English typescript translated this title as “The Family and the Gens,” I follow Shternberg’s December 1, 1912, recommendation to Boas in a letter archived in the AMNH that “Clan” is more suitable.

Beginning with this chapter, numbers in bold at the ends of paragraphs track the corresponding page numbers in Shternberg, *Sem’ia i Rod*. While they are intended to allow specialist readers to quickly locate the same material in a Russian edition, it should be stressed that the considerable variation among all earlier versions of the Shternberg manuscript makes these indexings approximate only. Unmarked footnotes, such as note 3 below, are Shternberg’s.]

² [**Editor’s note:** Page numbers for the AMNH Russian and English typescripts restart here at 1.]

³ Leopold von Schrenck, *Reisen und Forschungen im Amur-Lande*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: Eggers and Co., 1860–1900). [**Editor’s note:** von Schrenck’s works were also published in Russian under the title, *Ob inorodtsakh Amurskago kraia*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: Imperatorskaia Akademiia Nauk, 1883–1903). Shternberg’s references are to the German edition published in St. Petersburg. These references are not found in Shternberg, *Giliaki*, and Shternberg, *Sem’ia*.]

⁴ Siebold, *Nippon*, vol. II, 169. [**Editor’s note:** The full reference is: Philipp Franz von Siebold, *Nippon. Archiv zur Beschreibung von Japan und dessen neben- und schutzländern Jezo mit den südlichen Kurilen, Sachalin, Korea und den Iukiu-Inseln*, 2 vols. (Wurzburg: L. Woerl, 1897). The AMNH English typescript curtailed this quotation; the longer version here was restored from the AMNH Russian typescript, Shternberg, *Giliaki*, and Shternberg, *Sem’ia*. Von Siebold (1796–1866) was a Dutch explorer expelled from Japan by Japanese authorities after accusations of spying. For more on von Siebold, see Harumi Befu and Josef Kreiner, eds., *Othernesses of Japan: Historical and Cultural Influences on Japanese Studies in Ten Countries* (Munich: Iudicium, 1992).]

"personal motives" of the Japanese traveler—namely, to his resentment toward Gilyak women who made him do common work on a par with other men [60].⁵

"Among the Gilyak, both on Sakhalin and on the continent," concludes von Schrenck, "polyandry does not exist." Von Schrenck was right in his own way: It was almost impossible for him personally to note the polyandric character of the Gilyak family, for it is quite true that open, public polyandry is not found among the Gilyak.⁶ Mamiya Rinzo's data in turn are rather vague. He noted the factual frivolity of sexual relations, but his ignorance of the Gilyak language prevented him from grasping the true nature and normative character of what he observed [61].

In order to discover the polyandric nature of Gilyak marriage, we must penetrate deep into the most intimate features of Gilyak life, know their language, and spend considerable time among them in their yurtas. Rinzo's prolonged stay as a dweller and working man in a Gilyak house enabled him to see what escaped the attention of von Schrenck, who observed Gilyak life as an outsider. Acquaintance with the nomenclature of relationships is necessary for a correct understanding of the form of the Gilyak family. Here again von Schrenck failed on account of a deficient knowledge of the Gilyak language.⁷

To an outside observer, Gilyak marriage fails to present any striking peculiarities. To all appearances, the wife or wives of the Gilyak (the polygynous marriages of one man to two, three, or four wives are customarily permissible) are his own individual property. The man very often buys his wife from her agnates (father or brothers) for a very high price. The woman comes to live permanently in his house, follows him in his travels and migrations, and is considered before the world to be his wife and the mother of his children. The children belong exclusively to the father and inherit from him following his death.

After the birth of the first child, the father and mother give up their former names, and are henceforth addressed by the name of the child as "father of so and so," or "mother of so and so" (teknonymy). The exclusive rights of the husband over his wife seem to be publicly sanctioned; he is allowed to take reprisals against, or even kill [*krovovaia rasprava*], anyone who infringes upon his marital rights.

The clan is based on the agnatic principle; marriage is exogamous. The traveler may visit the entire Gilyak territory, live in the dwellings of the natives, carefully observe their family life, and yet fail to notice anything unusual. In the large win-

⁵ Von Schrenck says, "Having no cause to suspect Rinzo of intentional misrepresentation, we cannot refrain from supposing that he was influenced by personal motives; the resulting obscurity in his statements gave rise to diversified interpretations It is not improbable that vanity and the fear of losing the respect of the Government (on account of his slave-like position) prompted the traveler to explain his humiliating position among the Gilyak as due to a custom of their country" (i.e., to polyandry and the ruling position of the women). *Reisen*, vol. III, pt. II, 19–20.

⁶ [**Editor's note:** Lydia Black has rightly observed that while "polygyny" might better capture Shternberg's intent, polyandry likely resonated more fully with Shternberg's emphasis on women participating in group marriage.]

⁷ The few data contributed by von Schrenck on that subject are highly misleading. Thus, for instance, he wrongly asserts that a Gilyak calls his mother and his father's sister by a common name, *imk* (see von Schrenck, *Reisen*, vol. III, pt. II, 6). Von Schrenck's informant probably meant the mother's sister, and not the father's sister.

ter houses, residents are grouped by families, each with its own concerns. During the summer every family lives in a separate yurt, often far from neighbors and relatives. The relations between husband and wife or wives and their children are peaceful and tender. Married couples frequently give evidence of great affection for each other; when one dies, the other may commit suicide or seemingly die of grief.⁸ Thus we seem to deal with a typical individual family commonly called patriarchal, and certainly anything but polyandric.

Such were my own first impressions. But no sooner had I gathered some information about kinship nomenclature than grave doubts began to arise in my mind, prompting me immediately to undertake a detailed study of that side of the problem. A systematic census of the population seemed to me the best way of studying kinship terminology. With this goal in mind, I undertook, in the course of the winter of 1891, my first census of Gilyak settlements of Sakhalin's northwestern coast, the result of which was my discovery of their complex classificatory kinship system and unique form of group marriage.⁹ Subsequent censuses taken in different Gilyak regions (1891–1894) gave me a full and rich, multifaceted picture of kin nomenclature and sexual relations with their attendant variations by clan and dialect.¹⁰ During the same period I also studied the southern neighbors of the Gilyak, the Ainu, and found among them a system quite different—one representing typical features of endogamy and maternal succession without any trace of group marriage. Among the Tungus [Evenki] of the Amur region, especially among the isolated Orochi on the coast of the northern Sea of Japan, I discovered a fully developed classificatory system of relationship connected with group marriage roughly similar to that of the Gilyak but differing from it in many important points. In this way I accumulated sufficient material for this general comparative survey of kinship terminology, as well as family and clan organization among all the representatives of the Amur region.

In light of both the great importance of kinship terminology for understanding the Gilyak family and clan structure, as well as the recent scholarly debates that surround classificatory kinship systems and their meaning generally, we find it necessary now to consider Gilyak classificatory nomenclature in its fullest detail [62].

⁸ [Editor's note: The Polish scholar Bronislaw Pilsudskii, who began his ethnographic career while in exile with Shternberg on Sakhalin Island, recorded several such instances. See Robert Austerlitz, "Ten Nivkh Erotic Poems," *Acta Ethnographica of the Academy of Sciences of Hungary* 33, nos. 1–4 (1984): 33–44; "Two Gilyak Song Texts" in *To Honor Roman Jakobson—Essays on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday, 11 October 1966*, I: 99–113 (The Hague: Mouton, 1967); Alfred E. Majewicz, ed., *Collected Works of Bronislaw Pilsudskii. Vol. 1: The Aborigines of Sakhalin (1)* (Steszew, Poland: International Institute of Ethnolinguistic and Oriental Studies, 1992); and Bronislaw Pilsudskii, "The Gilyaks and their Songs," *Folk-lore* 34 (1913): 477–490. A recent, excellent volume exploring the relationship between Pilsudskii and Shternberg is: Vladislav M. Latyshev, *Dorogoi Lev Iakovlevich* [Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk: SOKM, 1996].]

⁹ A report on this subject entitled "The Gilyak of Sakhalin" was in due time presented by the author to the Moscow Anthropological Society; in 1893 it appeared in the Society's journal, *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* [The Ethnographic Review] (1893, II). In the foreign press two notices of the article appeared: one by Mr. Th. Volkov in *L'Anthropologie* (V, 341), the other in *Die Neue Zeit* (1893) by Mr. Friedrich Engels.

¹⁰ [Editor's note: Koshkin discusses Shternberg's Sakhalin censuses in Shternberg, *Giliaki*, xiii.]