

## FOURTEEN



### THE CLAN<sup>1</sup>

[193–223; 278–316; 81–109; 34–49]<sup>2</sup>

IN OUR DISCUSSION of Gilyak marriage, we have touched on many aspects of the clan system. Now we intend to examine the clan as an institution which regulates the entire life of the people. Here we could do no better than to follow the definition used by the Gilyak themselves when they formulate their own understanding of the clan [34].

The term which is used to designate the clan is fascinating in itself. It is *khal*, or literally, “sheath.”<sup>3</sup> It seems a very good term for designating the unity of origin—the common womb, or common origin.<sup>4</sup> On the subject of clan alliances the Gilyak are surprisingly concise, all the while making clear how deeply fundamental their attitude is to this most important aspect of their social organization. If you ask a Gilyak why he considers this or that person as his relative, you inevitably get the answer, “We have one (common) *akhmalk*, one *imgi*, one fire, one mountain man, one sea man, one heaven’s man, one earth’s man, one bear, one devil, one *tkhusind* (ransom, or clan penalty), and one sin.” An analysis of this formula will help us more deeply understand the nature of the Gilyak clan alliance.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> [**Editor’s note:** Archival correspondence between 1929 and 1932 indicates that Iulia Averkieva was the translator for this chapter. She assisted both Boas, in New York, and Sarra Ratner-Shternberg, in Leningrad, in the posthumous editing of the Shternberg *Social Organization* manuscript (appendix A).]

<sup>2</sup> [**Editor’s note:** Shternberg published a version of this chapter nearly identical to the AMNH and the 1933 Soviet editions in Shternberg, “Giliaki,” *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* 28, no. 63 (1904h), 66–97.]

<sup>3</sup> [**Editor’s note:** While *khal* signifies sheath in the Eastern dialect, it signifies the body more generally as a container or covering in the Western dialect.]

<sup>4</sup> It is extremely interesting that the closely related term *khala* exists also among neighboring Tungusic tribes—Orok, Oroch, Gold, and Negidal—with whom the Gilyak have some shared kin terms, such as *aki* (Gilyak, older brother) vs. *aga* (among Tungusic tribes), notwithstanding the considerable divergence among the languages of these peoples in both lexical and grammatical senses.

<sup>5</sup> [**Editor’s note:** In the AMNH English typescript, Averkieva deleted the sentence beginning with “On the subject of clan alliances.”]

### ONE *AKHMALK* AND ONE *IMGİ*: ONE WIFE'S FATHER AND ONE DAUGHTER'S HUSBAND<sup>6</sup>

As we know, securing a wife was one of the hardest tasks which faced a Gilyak man, for the number of men generally exceeded the number of women. And since women had to be paid for, the rich men usually grabbed most of the women for themselves while the poor men were left out entirely. Their efforts to acquire wives often involved great risks and even loss of life. Thus the marriage norms of the Gilyak clan gave everyone the right to a woman of the *akhmalk* clan, particularly to their mothers' brothers' daughters. This was not only a right but a religious obligation. The bride-price, in such cases, if not a mere formality, was shared by the entire clan, for the clansmen were also interested in marriage operating through one particular clan. At worst, until a man was able to establish a family of his own, the families of his brothers were his families, and his brothers' wives were his wives, for he had legitimate matrimonial rights to them. In turn, clansmen did not have to worry about the lot of their wives and children after their death. During his lifetime, his wife and children are legally and often *de facto* the wife and children of his younger brothers. So they will also be after his death. According to the decision of the clan, one of the younger brothers of the deceased will substitute for him in the rights and obligations of husband and father. If there are no younger brothers, one of the oldest men in the clan will become the breadwinner for the family of the deceased. This is an immutable law [36].

Such are the advantages the clan alliance bestows upon its members. Being born to a clansman is the only required *justis titulus* for belonging to a clan. If a man is born *itk khavrid* (that is, out of wedlock, without knowledge of his father), he is effectively without clan, a pariah, and a burden to himself and to others. Since he does not know his father, he does not know what clan he belongs to and which women are his potential wives and who is forbidden to him. Under these circumstances he could unconsciously violate sexual norms and bring down innumerable misfortunes upon himself and his relatives. Fortunately, instances of people without knowledge of their fathers do not exist. If a girl becomes pregnant out of wedlock, she is pressured to reveal the identity of the father. Having learned this, her family can force the man to marry her, an obligation he may only embrace, since this implies a greatly reduced bride-price. In the event of the girl's refusal to expose the father, the child is killed, and the clan is saved from sin and misfortune.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> [Editor's note: The AMNH English typescript shortened this subheading to "One *Akhmalk* and One *Imgi*," and omitted six lengthy paragraphs found in the AMNH Russian typescript, 193–195; Shternberg, *Giliaki*, 82–84; and Shternberg, *Sem'ia*, 35–36. While the paragraphs largely review principles of clan unity discussed in previous chapters, they make for an uncharacteristically lengthy discrepancy between the English and Russian versions. Judging from the seemingly uncontroversial content of the discrepancies and a May 5, 1909, Boas letter to Bogoraz, it may have been that Boas or Averkieva was trying to economize on space (appendix A). Throughout this chapter, the spirit of translation is abridgment. Efforts have been taken to restore key passages or indicate omissions where it seemed appropriate.]

<sup>7</sup> [Editor's note: The last four sentences of the this paragraph, not found in the AMNH English typescript, have been restored from the AMNH Russian typescript.]



**FIG. 21.** A young Gilyak woman, 1890s. Photo by Lev Shternberg. Source: AAN f. 282, o. 2, d. 162, l. 108.

The Gilyak clan, however, like the clans of so many other tribes, has not been able to preserve its purity and exclusiveness. It has been forced into retreat and compromise by the adoption and acceptance of strangers.

This has happened in many ways, either through epidemics (which decimate the clan) or a war in which most of the men are killed. When such a clan can find another in an equally helpless condition, and which is *akhmalk* or *imgi* to them, a union may willingly be sealed by both clans. Usually the adopted persons married the widows of the clan into which they came and thereby joined the clan hearth and clan alliance.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> **[Editor's note:** While adhering to Shternberg's basic points, this material is found in a slightly different sequence in the AMNH Russian and the 1933 Soviet versions. In her translations, Averkieva deftly omitted references to "our previous chapter on religion," which are mentioned in each of the AMNH Russian and 1933 Soviet versions, despite the fact that only Shternberg, *Giliaki*, 49–81, actually contains the chapter, "Religiia Giliakov."

Shternberg, *Giliaki*, more closely followed the ordering of Shternberg's shorter 1904 monograph (Shternberg, 1904f–h), where "Religiia Giliakov" also precedes this chapter. What this helps us understand is the piecemeal nature of the manuscript Ratner-Shternberg came across among her husband's papers. While Shternberg's handwriting in the AMNH Russian typescript presented a full text to the reader, it is less clear how the chapters themselves, each separately paginated, originally came together. Of more immediate significance for this chapter is that a number of religious implications of the discussion have been omitted, having less weight here without the preceding religion chapter.]

Adoption has played an important role in Gilyak life. Indeed, when a clan has suffered the near mortal blow of the loss of most its members, newcomers are often a much-needed energetic element, more steadfast in the struggle for existence than the original members of the clan, who may have already been weakened and are gradually dying. Such may be the law of racial energy, which finally becomes exhausted under unfavorable conditions (the same fate may be shared by the descendants of the newcomers, who are replaced, in turn, by new invaders, providing, of course, they survive that long). It might appear strange that a clan composed of old members as well as the descendants of newcomers consider the former as the founders. The old kinship ties continue their influence even when the clan embraces strangers. The descendants of both sides do not necessarily merge when performing their obligations as clan members. They can continue to be in separate groups and count their relationship according to the old traditions of their clans. I happened to witness such a process. The population of the village of Tangi consisted of members of one clan which divided into two parts: the more flourishing group claimed its origin from a newcomer, an Ainu; the other group considered itself the clan founders. When the latter become extinct, signs of which are already noticeable, the former will be the only representatives of the clan and will likely call themselves the founders. The same process has been repeated many times [37].

Such wholesale adoption is, however, exceptional. Generally the adopted stranger is a person who has run away from his own clan and settled down elsewhere. He may not remain a stranger for long, since an extended sojourn normally creates a certain sympathy among members. The stranger sometimes assists at the celebration of clan holidays, and eventually his marriage to a widow of the clan will lead to his adoption. Very curious cases of adoption have occurred. Sometimes two men of different clans marry two sisters (ordinarily this only happens to two brothers). The influence of the principle of common father-in-law is so strong that children of such marriages are considered brothers and sisters. They call their aunts "mother" and marriage between them is prohibited. This appears as a fictitious clan relationship. However, if conditions are favorable and they continue to live in the same village, and one of them is separated from his own clan, they will come together to help each other in arranging clan festivals, and so on. Finally, in the second or third generation the union of these clans is an actual fact.

But usually the composition of a clan is uniform. The cases of adoption in general are rare. The past influence of endogamy and exogamy has long ago disappeared into the dim legendary past, and does not have any effect on the clan's kinship ties.

### ONE FIRE

Fire is a symbol of the unity of the clan. Among the Gilyak, as among all primitive tribes, fire is a clan deity. As one Gilyak told me, an old woman who is the spirit of the fire sits within the hearth; another told me that it is an old man and an old woman with their children who sit within the hearth. The role of these "master owners of the fire," however, extends beyond the simple influence of warmth. As the divine ancestors of the clan, these spirits are respected both by living clansmen and by those who have departed to another world and who have become the deities of

other elements—the forest, the sea, and the mountains. Through the fire-spirits, the latter can exercise a strong influence upon the well-being of the people. So the masters of the fire are not only deities who warm and guard the people from every kind of misdeed or evil spirit, but they are also the mediators between their clansmen and the multitude of deities who control the fortunes of the people.<sup>9</sup>

For important events such as illness, hunting, or departure on perilous journeys, the clansman throws into the fire his modest offering—a leaf of tobacco, angelica, or a tippie of vodka—and prays to the old woman to answer his prayer.<sup>10</sup> If it is out of her range of influence, she will direct his invocation to the appropriate deity.

In order to understand the attitude of the clan towards the fire-spirit one must bear in mind the following facts: (1) Deceased persons are cremated, that is, given up to the common fire spirit, who accepts its favorites into its own clan; hence, they can become masters of the clan fire. (2) All those who perish by lightning or fire also become fire-spirits.<sup>11</sup> (3) The representation of the fire-spirit as an old woman instead of a man is a survival of a matrilineal organization of the clan. (4) The universality of the fire, its ability to spread rapidly, and the multiplicity of its tongues which are understood as real by all primitive tribes—all these are qualities which lend to the fire a special advantage over other deities, namely, the ability to transmit prayer faster and more eloquently than any other medium. (5) Fire warms and purifies and drives away the evil spirits [38].

Only clansmen can make fire in each other's houses, and only clansmen have the right to take fire out of each other's houses. A stranger who lights his pipe from the clan hearth cannot leave the yurta until he finishes his pipe. Any violation of these principles on the part of a stranger brings serious consequences to the clan and to the offender.

Every clan has its own flint for striking fire, and it is kept by the oldest member of the group. Only with this flint may a Gilyak make the fire to cook bear meat for the bear festival (an all-important event in Gilyak life). When a clan is forced to separate, the oldest member breaks the flint and gives half of it to the oldest member of the departing group. Not until this formal action has taken place is the clan considered divided.

As the representative of the *akhmalk* clan, the mistress of the hearth plays a key role in relations between clans, using her patronage to tie the clan among whom she lives and raises her family to the clan from which she came, and from which, generation after generation, she has brought her brother's sons and their children.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> In the Vedas the fire Agni also plays the role of a mediator between men and deities; he intercedes on behalf of others as a herald [*gerol'd*] and a priest [*zhrets*].

<sup>10</sup> [Editor's note: While the AMNH typescript translated the reference to angelica in this sentence as a "sweet root," the Russian reference to "*sladkii koren*" is a formal name denoting an aromatic plant, *Archangelica officinalis*, also known in Europe as "root of the Holy Ghost," which has long been cultivated for its medicinal and culinary qualities. I am grateful to Lydia Black for this observation.]

<sup>11</sup> The same belief is found among the Buriat, where those who perish from lightning become powerful and benevolent spirits who preside over sacrifices and prayers.

<sup>12</sup> [Editor's note: This paragraph, not found in the AMNH English typescript, has been restored from the Russian versions.]

### ONE MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN, ONE MAN OF THE SEA, ONE MAN OF THE SKY, AND ONE MAN OF THE EARTH

The spirits of the mountain, sea, sky, and earth are clan deities who play a most important role in Gilyak life. They are of particular interest because from them we can trace the genesis of primitive religion so widely spread all over the world. The deities of the Gilyak are supernatural and mythological beings, as among the Greeks and Romans. They are clansmen transformed into deities by a special happening or accident, such as being killed by a bear while on a hunt, being drowned, murdered, or burned, subsequently passing into the clans of the mountain spirits, water spirits, or fire.<sup>13</sup> In this way, they become small spirits themselves and patronize their living clansmen. These are not the fantastic heroes of classical clans, but close relatives of a living generation.

The favorites of the master spirits pass after death to the clan of their particular spirit for quite a long time. Among the mountain people, for instance, this period lasts "until second death" (that is, for two generations), during which time they patronize their clan. Mountain people send beasts to their living clansmen—sea people send fish and sea mammals, and so on. When a Gilyak speaks of some mountain or sea person who feeds him, he means one of his relatives who has become a spirit, either within his own memory or that of his father and grandfather. But as the reign of such favorites is not long, two generations being the furthest reach, there was often not time enough for proper communication with the deity because of the many deaths from wild beasts and by drowning. Thus the relationship between the clan and their divine protectors is very real and active. Special memorials erected by grateful clansmen are daily reminders of them [39].<sup>14</sup>

The ties of a clan to its divine ancestors are not confined to piety and grateful memories but are rooted in the real and powerful instinct of self-preservation. For the Gilyak there is no more positive truth than that everything he wrestles from nature in the desperate struggle for existence is the voluntary gift of the gods who patronize him, and that without their benevolence all his efforts would fail. As we know, the ancestor deities are the real supporters of the clan and are most interested in benefiting it. Hence no obligation is more important to a Gilyak than to encourage this benevolence in all possible ways. That is why the clan offerings and the festivals regularly honoring various spirits are such important occasions in clan life. That is why everyone considers active participation in these festivals a divine duty. It would not be amiss to say that in general all the social activity of the Gilyak is centered on preparations for solemn offerings. The poor and rich alike give everything in their power in order to make the offering plentiful and diversified.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> [*Editor's note:* While the start of this paragraph follows the AMNH Russian and English type-scripts, notably the 1933 Soviet editions stress the opposite, that the spirits are not the ethereal figures of mythology but the products of simple, special human events.]

<sup>14</sup> The hut where the remains of a man killed by a bear are preserved serves as a memorial to the deceased. Drowned people are cremated, and on the spot where this is done a boat is placed with all the equipment for sea and river enterprise [*Editor's note:* "Enterprise" is taken from the Russian *promysel'*, which includes both hunting and fishing]. The paddles are placed upright so that they meet at an angle in order to be visible.

<sup>15</sup> [*Editor's note:* This paragraph abridges longer though similar material in the AMNH Russian and the 1933 Soviet editions.]

Indeed, there is a communal interest in clan offerings. Even in purely personal affairs such as illness, when an offering has to be made, a Gilyak invites all his relatives even from great distances in order to have them enjoy the benevolent results of his offerings.

The Gilyak consider it a duty to offer hospitality not only towards newcomers or the hungry but also towards those who, from our point of view, may not deserve this hospitality at all. Regardless of the number of visits paid by a neighbor, every time he appears in the home of a Gilyak, he is treated to the best food and the inevitable handful of tobacco for his pipe. If there is not enough tobacco in the house, then the host and guest smoke in turns from one pipe. This custom is especially striking when delicacies are available. If, for instance, a glass of wine is given to the head of the yurt, he would never drink it alone but would merely take the smallest sip and pass the glass on to everyone in the yurt, including the children. Otherwise, "It would be a great sin for which it is possible to die." It is a sin not to share food, and the reason for this is quite clear: A man is fed by his deities and his deities belong to the entire clan. Therefore to eat and not to share with one's clansmen or not to feed them at all is the greatest sin and entails the loss of the goodwill of his deities. The role of the hearth is important here. In the hearth lives a man and a woman, with fire spirits who are the clansmen or ancestors of the house never taking their eyes off all that happens within it. They are, as we saw above, the mediators between the clan and its deities. Therefore it is quite natural to believe that the deities of the hearth are the guardians of the principle of hospitality.

Besides all the ties which bind the clan together, there is the common ownership of all earthly goods. If this is not expressed in a purely communal form, it is only because there is no need for it. Life is so simple, the conditions for getting food are so easy, and the goods of nature so widely distributed, that there is no need for communal forms of production and distribution. But the principle exists nevertheless, as can be seen in communal hunting and fishing expeditions. Sometimes an expedition will set out in one boat to hunt sea mammals, and the owner of it, usually the most skillful hunter, will not get a larger share of the game than the youngest boy paddling the canoe; in addition, the owner will give a part of the game to families who did not even participate in the expedition. Dried fish, the main food of the Gilyak, is considered almost common property. Anyone whose provisions are gone takes fish from his neighbor without any remonstrance on the part of the latter. In all cases, nobody starves while some clansman or another has provisions. The hungry person has but to settle in the yurt of his richer kin, or merely to visit two or three times a day, and everything will be shared.

More individualistic ownership is recognized in connection with articles of luxury such as costly swords, textiles, fur coats, and so on. But this is only due to the fairly new development of exchange. In really important affairs such as the buying of a wife, payment of ransom, or burials, everybody considers it his duty to offer his property for the benefit of the clan.

The same principle of communal property is the basis for hereditary laws. The guiding principle is that the property of a clansman should not go out of the clan. The well-known saying "*Si sui heredes non habent gentilicium habento*" acts among

the Gilyak with all its force. In the absence of an appropriate inheritor in the immediate clan group, property goes to agnatic kinsmen, notwithstanding the fact that they are very remote relatives and there are nearer cognates. The latter can receive, through the will of a deceased person only, certain articles of *sagund*,<sup>16</sup> that will inevitably be brought back to the clan. Therefore, if the deceased is from the *akhmalk* clan, he gives those articles to his *imgi* clan which the latter will return as bride-price. Thus iron *sagund* is given, for it is always part of a bride-price. If the deceased is from the *imgi* clan then his agnatic relatives, that is, *akhmalk*, will be given fur *sagund* because that is generally contained in the dowry of the bride [40].

### ONE BEAR

The fattening of a bear and the participation in bear festivals are common clan duties. The Gilyak expression "*Khalgu, utgu nandkh muve*," which means "Clansmen, be the guests," is used by adolescent youth as they walk from yurta to yurta calling the kinsmen to taste the sacred meat of the bear and other foods commonly prepared by the clan for this occasion.<sup>17</sup>

Two main points characterize the bear festival. First, Gilyak celebrate of the bear as a personality, as a potential clansman of the master of the mountain and also of one's own clansman or his descendant (since his death transferred him to the clan of the mountain people). Second, through the bear's spirit, various offerings are transmitted to the mountain spirit and its clan, and consequently to the kindred deities, the clan benefactors. Hence the bear festival has greater significance for the clan's well-being than any other clan offerings. That is because the offerings during the bear festival go to the highest mountain deity, who is the greatest and most powerful controller of all the wealth of the forests. The sacrificial bear, well-fed and honored, will be a daily defender of his clansmen before that great mountain deity. Notwithstanding the presence of outsiders, the festival is strictly a clan affair. Only clansmen can participate in its arrangements. Only sons-in-law can be invited as guests. They have to be fed, which means that they are persons to whom the benevolence of the deities of the clan also extends.

The bear festival is a very important facet in the social solidarity of the clan. The obligations to participate in the preparation of food, in numerous expenditures, and in the reception of the guests create a background of well-coordinated activities

<sup>16</sup> *Sagund*, precious goods *sui generis*, are used only on important occasions such as the payment of the bride-price, dowry, ransom, or burial. They are divided into three categories: (1) iron *sagund*, such as big kettles, spears, armor, expensive Japanese sabers, and so on (these articles in the main comprise the bride-price); (2) fur *sagund*, such as fur coats and other fur articles which are included in the dowry; and (3) silk *sagund*, such as Chinese silk cloth and clothing which are used only on very solemn occasions and as burial dress.

<sup>17</sup> [Editor's note: This is another point where Averkieva omitted expository references to the "preceding" (Shternberg, 1904f-h, and Shternberg, *Giliaki*) chapter on religion. Although the ethnographic literature on bear sacrifice is considerable, A. Irving Hallowell's "Bear Ceremonialism in the Northern Hemisphere," *American Anthropologist* 28: 1-175, remains a classic. For more on the bear festival among the Gilyak, see Erukhim A. Kreinovich, "La fête de l'ours chez les Nivkh," *Ethnographie* 74-75 (1977): 195-208.]





FIG. 22. A Gilyak couple, 1890s. The man at right wears the emblem of Russian imperial officials bestowed upon Gilyak overseers. Photo by Lev Shternberg. Source: AAN f. 282, o. 2, d. 98, l. 25.

for the common welfare of the clan. The periodical meeting of clansmen, scattered sometimes over great areas, helps maintain the traditions and ties of the clan alliance. Finally, the character of the festival itself—the cheerful preparations, the triumphal reception of the guests, common noisy feasts, discussions, dances, songs, races, fencing, and religious ceremonials, in short, all that refines and adorns life—give the clan alliance the highest value as the source of all spiritual and social happiness.

### ONE DEVIL

In some cases a dead kinsman passes to the clan of a benevolent deity. In other cases the opposite may happen: a kinsman who has been embittered in his lifetime and left the clan, or a kinsman who was not avenged or did not receive a proper burial celebration, cannot go to the land of the dead. He may pass only into the clan of evil deities or he will avenge his kinsmen on his own. The same can happen on the part of an offended or murdered stranger. The propitiation of such clan enemies is as important to the clan as the gratification of the benevolent deities, so there appears to be a common obligation to reward a shaman for the work and pain of struggling with such enemies, or to meet the expenses for propitiation, etc. [41].

### ONE *TKHUSIND*

In the Gilyak language, *tkhusind* refers literally to the ransom received or paid by the clan in cases of vengeance. But it has come to be more widely used in the sense of a fine or penalty that compensates a range of transgressions. For instance, *tkhusind* is

demanding for an abducted woman, for offense against a woman's chastity, or for profanation of holy things (such as the spoiling of the hearth, the violation of taboos during the bear festival), for theft, and so on. In all these cases the collective responsibility rests upon the clan; that is, they are obliged to defend the rights of their clan against a stranger and to take responsibility for all violations by their clansmen. But ransom is only a later substitution for the more important principle of "an eye for an eye."

Among the Gilyak, murder within the clan is not punished because the clan cannot spill the blood of a clansman; it is the blood of an ancestor.<sup>18</sup> This attitude is not due merely to religious principle, but may also be attributed to the categorical imperative of clan survival, for the strength of the clan lies in its numbers and in internal peace. Every case of vengeance within the clan would inevitably lead to another on the part of the relatives of the punished person, and thus there would be continuous strife ending in the physical and moral disintegration of the clan. Murder or any other serious violation of rights and laws by a clansman, however, is not left entirely unpunished. He suffers a political death, for it ends in the social ostracism of the offender. He is forced to leave the clan and go to a distant settlement, thereby losing all his privileges of the clan alliance, not only during his lifetime but after death as well. The latter loss is more important, for only clansmen have the right to cremate the dead. Murder within the clan is very rare, for the numerous avoidance taboos between clan relatives reduce the chances for disagreements; the broad communal marital rights allay jealousy and make the abduction of women unnecessary (this being usually the most frequent cause for bloodshed).

It is quite a different matter when bloodshed occurs between strangers. The law that "the bones of a clansman have to be lifted" is inexorable. "To lift the bones" is a technical term for blood revenge. Blood must be atoned for by blood, and only in extreme cases can compensation be substituted for revenge. This obligation is colored more by a religious element than by an emotional one. Revenge is obligatory not only to the contemporaries of the victim but rests as a burden on the following two generations of the clan as well. Vengeance is obligatory in cases of unintentional, accidental murder, even when linkage to a person is tangential. One Gilyak provoked vengeance on himself and his clan when his gun went off accidentally as he was lifting it from the bottom of his boat and killed the steersman. Vengeance is even considered obligatory in connection with animals. It is no less severe against a bear who has killed a man than it is against a human being [42].

This ritual of vengeance is very important for an understanding of the psychology that underlies this institution. Here we begin our analysis. As soon as the people learn that a man has been killed by a bear in the forest, they start out to catch the murderer. If they cannot find the actual murderer, they have to kill three other bears in its stead (the kinsmen of the murderer). If they fail to accomplish this during the winter, it has to be done in the summer. Above all, the mountain men must give to the Gilyak *tkhusind* in the form of plentiful game.

<sup>18</sup> [Editor's note: The AMNH Russian and the 1933 Soviet editions inserted the following footnote here: "After a murder within a clan that has intermarried with Ainu (a people who still practice matriline) the mother's brother and a close agnate of the victim collect the ransom and divide it among themselves."]

But if the bear who killed the man, or a kinsman of the bear, is caught, it is subjected to great wrath. At first its teeth are knocked out with an axe. It is then skinned and pricked constantly with knives. The most extraordinary curses are addressed to it. After the skin is removed, it is wrapped around the man who was killed; if there is nothing left of him, a wooden image is used instead. Then it is seated in the sledge with the head of the bear under the seat. This is taken to the settlement accompanied by loud cries mixed with many exclamations in honor of the killed man and in defamation of his murderer.

If the bear is not found, then a wooden image of its upper torso is placed under the seat of the murdered man, whose body is wrapped in a cloak made of shavings.<sup>19</sup> A hut resembling a bear's cage with two openings for the offerings to follow is erected not far from the man's native village. On the outside at each corner of the hut are erected four planed trees, while the interior is decorated with sanctified *inau* (ritual wooden shavings). The remains of the murderer and victim are placed here in the same position as they are brought from the forest.

Next to the hut, a feast from the bear meat is arranged. The kinsmen, with big pieces of the bear's meat in their hands, sit on both sides of a long fire. Everybody cuts the meat into small pieces and throws it over the fire to the person sitting across from him. The slice is caught and roasted on a knife over the fire. It is the greatest possible insult to the bear, as ordinarily bear meat is only boiled. Pieces of the slice are then bitten off with the greatest disgust and thrown away (generally it is a great sin to drop to the ground even the smallest of bones). After this procedure of refined vengeance a feast begins with offerings to the mountain master and to the recent victim. A lighted tinder is first thrown into the fire, then follow various foods. Two guardians are placed near the hut for the night in case the bear's spirit should come seeking revenge. Usually the guardians assure everyone that they heard cries during the night of the killed man, "Oh, the bear!"—and they rush with their spears upon an invisible avenger. In the morning there really seem to be blood traces on the blades of their spears [43].

The feast ends and the peace between the mountain people and the clan of the victim is reestablished. The victim has been accepted into and henceforth will live with the mountain people clan. Three generations of his relatives will make offerings twice a year partly to their deified clansman and partly to the mountain master.

We indicated above that the urge to revenge was based more on a religious motive than an emotional one. If it is obligatory up to the third generation, and in cases of accidental murder towards a friend or even a cognate, then it is more a burden which weighs upon the clan than an impulsive action inspired by anger. The first reaction is usually pity for the soul of the dead, followed by fear of the soul and the clan gods.

<sup>19</sup> The shavings are considered holy objects of magical power. The cult of these holy shavings, *inau*, plays an enormous role in Gilyak religion. [**Editor's note:** Here, the AMNH Russian and the 1933 Soviet editions refer to the religion chapter found in Shternberg, *Giliaki*.] Those Gilyak elected by spirits are usually buried in a cloak made of shavings. For instance, women who give birth to twins or triplets are buried in such cloaks because they are considered superior beings. The poor are dressed for the funeral in *inau* cloaks instead of costly Chinese silk garments. This leads one to imagine that in olden times dresses made of shavings were in common use and that antiquity has invested them with sanctity.

The soul of a man who died violently cannot pass on to the common "village of the dead," where earthly life is continued. Until it is avenged, that is, until the blood of the murderer gives it strength to "lift the bones," it is forced to circle around in the air in the form of a bird-avenger, making horrible cries during the night and rotting gradually until it finally falls to earth in the form of dust and perishes forever. The Gilyak call that bird *takhs*. It is a gray bird with a red beak and is called "a lover of war." Probably this surname is the source of belief in the bird's power, because wars among the Gilyak are exclusively the results of vengeance. Consequently birds of prey, who are "lovers of war," are apparently the souls of murdered kinsmen. Upon the grave of such a kinsman is placed a stump with the roots upward, in the shape of a bird.<sup>20</sup> Sometimes the latter is shaped with iron teeth and its extremities are shaped like human legs as in some swastika examples.<sup>21</sup> This horrible and unfortunate bird cries for vengeance during the night, seeking rest and return to the realm of its dead kinsmen; and of course it has the power to punish its clansmen who have forgotten their obligations. Even when vengeance is substituted by compensation, it is not satisfied. The sacrifice of a dog is needed and its heart is given to the bird. Otherwise it avenges both sides brutally.

Because the soul of a victim exists for not more than three generations, as is the case with every human soul, the obligation of vengeance ceases with the third generation. But until that moment, the pitiful existence of the soul of the victim continues to torment the conscience of his clansmen and to threaten them with the horrors of the avenger. These motives prevail over the more immediate impulse for retribution. That is why the fury of avengers never extends to the entire clan of a murderer but is limited to the killing of two or three of his clansmen. The killing of women and attempts on property are thoroughly avoided.

Nonetheless the urge to avenge is exceedingly intense. The news of a murder immediately unites the clan into a unanimous body which acts with feverish energy. The offending clan, whose task lies not so much in guarding the murderer but in guarding the entire clan, has a similar reaction. Every kinsman is threatened with death from the avengers, who search feverishly for traces of the murderer. It is not important to them to find the real murderer; they will be satisfied with any male representative of that clan, even if he is a swaddling infant. That is why mothers in moments of great danger conceal the sex of their male children [44].

It is not hard to imagine the feelings experienced by both sides until the end of the conflict. When both clans live in the same settlement the thing is a bit easier to bear, for at least there is no suspense. The matter is sealed by an armed conflict immediately after the murder. Relatives of the deceased, followed by several armed kinsmen, run toward the yurtas of the murderer's clan and fall upon the first man. The relatives of the murderer take his side and the battle begins. After several hours it may end, and if there is an equal number of deaths on both sides, the incident is closed. Sometimes a third clan intervenes and tries to settle the conflict peaceably.

<sup>20</sup> Usually the roots of stumps upon the graves of those who died naturally are turned downward.

<sup>21</sup> A specimen of this kind, which was brought by von Schrenck from the mouth of the Amur, can be found in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences in Leningrad.

If the clans live in different settlements, however, then martial law reigns. If the settlements happen to be near each other, the defenders are in a complete state of siege. There can be no question of outdoor work while it lasts. Neither hunting nor fishing is possible on account of a possible ambush in every corner. Even one's own settlement is not safe, for any night the enemy may invade it. Sometimes the remoteness of the hostile clan necessitates distant expeditions on foot or by boat. It must be a magnificent spectacle to see a crowd of warriors in their best attire, glistening spears in hand, quivers on their backs, with knives and Japanese sabers stuck in their belts, furiously shaking their weapons and overwhelming the primeval forests with their cries to the deities for vengeance.

*Pal-kurn miia.*

*Tli kurn miia.*

*Tel-kurn miia.*

*Mif-kurn miia.*

[The spirit of the mountains, hear.

The spirit of the sea, hear.

Spirit of the heaven, hear.

Spirit of the earth, hear.]

At the same time they brandish their spears and plunge them into every tree with the cry, "*Ch-khar miia*" ("O, tree listen"). This noisy excitement is soon replaced by a deep silence, and as they near the settlement of their enemies, their enthusiasm gives way to a concentrated seriousness.

The enemy, of course, has taken all the necessary precautions. He knows every strategic point in the vicinity. He waits for the attackers in places naturally suited for ambush and in specially constructed trenches, and will send a shower of arrows down upon imprudent warriors. There are many difficulties in the way of the aggressors. Any enterprise on the enemy's territory is dangerous. Among several clans, it is even prohibited to use the water from the rivers and brooks of the enemy. Provisions taken from home do not last very long, and the quick and open attack is impossible on account of the ambushade and the lookouts of the women who are inviolable during the attack. With great patience and under much privation, they must wait for a favorable moment or resolve in desperation to take undertake extreme risk. The attacked generally prefer to wait for the attack in their settlement. The men leave the women and gather in a separate yurta. At the first sign of the approaching enemy given by sentries, they will secretly gather behind the yurtas via secret pathways, ready to meet the attack.

According to the intertribal regulations, the battle may continue for one night or at most a day and a night until there are casualties. Then the enemy leaves and the attacked count the dead on both sides. If there were more killed on the side of the attacked a *casus belli* arises. In any case the aggressors must consider themselves satisfied. But unfortunately the matter does not always end with a few victims. Entire clans have perished, except for the women.

Sometimes a clan, weak in number and unable to withstand the attack, will be redeemed by the sacrifice of a single member, expiating the common guilt. I know

of a case when a youth, the cause of the conflict, upon news of the approaching enemy, begged his kinsmen to save themselves by escaping. When his kinsmen left the yurta with lowered eyes, he drank a cup of seal oil to give himself courage and rushed out brandishing his spear to meet the furious crowd of avengers. One finds many cases of chivalry exemplified in other forms. Although the attacks of the avengers are too impulsive to allow for plans, some war declarations come through mediators. The usual formula is merely, "The avenger has declared that he will wage war against you. If you are strong you will kill him; if he is stronger, he will kill you" [45].

Hostile expeditions are not always undertaken for the sake of revenge. Battles are very frequently fought for the sake of women, in fact, more frequently than for murders. The latter are quite rare and are a matter of momentary anger; "barbarians" may be easily excited for the slightest offense to vanity. But for the sake of a woman, a group of clansmen will invade in order to capture the beloved of their friend. This invasion is followed by a return incursion to recapture the one who was abducted. This second event is more serious, for it is of the same importance to the clan as revenge or ransom for a killed kinsman. Generally bloodshed is avoided by arranging the raid at a time when the men are absent from the settlement. Nevertheless, the matter is rarely settled without bloody consequences; both cases of capture and pursuit entail the necessity of "lifting the bones," that is, war with all its consequences.

Let us now discuss the *tkhusind* (penalty or ransom). At first it partly replaced the institution of blood vengeance and now coexists with, if almost displaces it. The factors which have gone into this reform are unknown. To my mind, however, it seems to lie in the peculiar form of exogamy among the Gilyak.

Every clan is united with at least four other clans by the most intimate kinship ties. From the *akhmalk* clan or clans it takes wives; to the *imgi* clan or clans it gives its women. Naturally these clans are dear to it; its mothers, daughters, and sisters unite them. The clan of a murderer might easily be a clan which takes wives from the offended clan or vice versa. As a result there appears the first mitigating condition—the inviolability of women. If the murderer belongs to the *akhmalk* clan, that is, to the clan of mothers and wives of the avengers, it cannot be expected that these women will be indifferent spectators of war against their fathers and brothers. If the murderer is a member of the *imgi* clan, the wives also do not easily consent to the death of their husbands at the hand of their fathers and brothers. In either case the interference of the women is inevitable [46].

The immunity granted to women greatly impedes the nature of the blood feud. The role of women as sentries is a unique one, intended to exhaust the enemy and weaken his spirit, far more than a simple active resistance. Taking advantage of their rights of *habeus corpus*, the women, enjoying complete immunity, patrol the vicinity day and night examining every bush and hummock in search of the hidden enemy. If the attackers lack the requisite strength for a frontal attack, they are never able to lull a vigilant and untouchable picket line. Thus, the patience of the attackers suffers by lack of food, is exhausted by the long raid and the tortures of waiting, and buckles under the forces of the weaker sex. A ground for peacemaking is thus established. The watchfulness of women wins out.

Such a settlement occurred in the following case. In 1851 thirty men from the village of Tebakh started out by land to visit vengeance upon one of the clans of the village Kol' for a murdered clansman. Their long trip was followed by a still longer period of vigilance on the part of the defending women who, poles in hand, constantly surveyed the site. When the avengers' water was gone, they were forced to abandon their aggressions, and the matter was settled peacefully [46].

Hence, it was enough to have several cases of peaceful settlement to put ransom on a legitimate footing with blood revenge. Later *tkhusind* replaced such aggressions entirely.

Tylor was right in maintaining that exogamy modified the relations between clans and brought peace, although his point of departure (namely, that the tendency toward peace caused the appearance of exogamy) was wrong. Indeed, primitive man is not so sentimental but extremely fearful of deities. His fear of punishment would be too great for the violation of such a rule even if it were obviously to his own interest. But he has found a definite means, as we already know, by which to circumvent the deities. In this instance, as in others, he resorts to a pious deceit which allows him to fulfill his religious duties and at the same time derive material benefits from the conflict. Normally this crucial religious procedure is ignored by scholars, despite the fact that traces of such pacifying rituals are found among all peoples. Among the Gilyak, as we will see later, these rites of ransom effect an imitation of blood revenge in the form of a struggle between representatives of the hostile clans, the killing of dogs, and the feeding of the spirits with the dogs' blood. Actual conflict is thus averted.<sup>22</sup>

The chief executor of the peacemaking procedure is the *khlay nivukh*, literally, "eloquent orator."<sup>23</sup> This man enjoys great respect among the Gilyak, for according to them, an eloquent individual is elected by a particular deity, who constantly dwells within him and inspires him with fine persuasive speeches. Quickness of speech and the ability to speak evenly for a long time, regardless of the content, is considered a gift of the highest order. "His tongue burns like the wings of a wind-mill" is the way the Gilyak extol prominent orators. The latter, in turn, consider themselves as the elect. On the continent, they always carry a wooden rod with a carved human head on the top of it, which symbolizes their patron. In excited moments they vigorously shake the rods in the air, threatening to break them if they are wrong in their arguments. Most often a *khlay nivukh* is selected for other distinguishing marks: he is usually wealthy, skillful in his occupations, experienced, brave, intelligent, and enjoys great popularity among kin. Every clan and every village has its own small *khlay nivukh*, although some are famous over all the land. They are called from great distances in case of need, as we would summon great lawyers. They execute their functions more for *honoris causa* than anything else. The usual fee consists only of a Chinese silk gown or a Japanese saber, neither of which compensate a wealthy person for the hardships of the task. The gifts of attire and

<sup>22</sup> [Editor's note: The AMNH English typescript omits the point made in the AMNH Russian and the 1933 Soviet editions that Shternberg saw evidence of a religiously sanctioned peacemaking ritual. I am grateful to Lydia Black for this observation.]

<sup>23</sup> Here we use the term of the Western dialect.

ornament are their *insignia magistratus*, which serves as the official costume during the negotiations [47].

When an avenging clan is sufficiently tried by their attempts at blood revenge, or when a murder happens under mitigating circumstances, the *khlay nivukh* is summoned. Naturally, the one who could gain the most advantageous conditions is sought out. He must of necessity belong to a neutral clan. It is impossible to send a kinsman because it would be a sin for him to have any dealings with the clan of the murderer, and because it might lead to still greater irritation between the two clans. The opponents also have their own speaker, who must defend their interests in the negotiations for a fine. The initiative is usually on the side of the offended clan.

One fine day the company of armed avengers, with a spokesman at their head, appears before the settlement of the murderer. In a nearby taiga location or on the bank of a river, they make a fire and camp. The spokesman in his official attire, with a spear in one hand and a small kettle in the other, goes alone to the hostile settlement. There in a *yurta* he is awaited by the enemy with their own *khlay nivukh* at the head. Resting on his spear, or sitting down and lighting a pipe with his own fire, he opens negotiations: "I am sent to you to say that you killed our man, and what a man he was! His right arm cost a great deal of money. If he were still alive, would he consent to take so little? His left arm cost so and so . . . etc." Then all the limbs of his body are counted and the sum of the penalty is named. If the opponents agree to this figure, they put into his kettle as many sticks as the number of ruble coins demanded. But usually the negotiations are not settled so easily. The speaker of the opposite side tries to vindicate the murderer and will propose a lesser amount. This gambit irritates the avenger's *khlay nivukh*, and he will leave angrily, threatening to stop the negotiations. His colleague will run after him with entreaties to yield. They sit down again, lighting their pipes, each with his own fire, and discuss the business until someone again gets angry and runs away. This ritual is repeated over and over. Protocol requires that the penalty should not be accepted at once, but only after resistance. These meetings and wranglings continue for 2 or 3 days [48].

At the end of the negotiations, the religious rites begin. They are an imitation of the bloody struggle, to hide from the soul of the deceased and the deities of the clan that the settlement has been of a peaceful character. The avengers with their spokesman proceed in the direction of the hostile settlement. A similar procession of the other clan comes to meet them. Several sazhen apart they stop, and the nearest clansmen of the victim and the murderer, armed with spears and bows, step out of the ranks together with their *khlay nivukh*. At a signal given by both spokesmen, they start shooting arrows or striking with their spears, skillfully dodging the blows. This is, of course, a fictitious duel, although it sometimes happens that the opponents lose their tempers and fight in earnest. The spokesmen, however, pacify their clients throughout the mock battle with constant reminders of the negotiations. In the meantime, the kinsmen bring two dogs, lead them between the opponents and kill them with spears—blood for blood. After that, the adversaries embrace each other and establish peace. The heart of the dog is given to the bird-avenger, while the meat is eaten at an ensuing feast. Then representatives of both sides go into the *yurta* of the murderer, where all the articles of *tkhusind* (kettles, spears, sabers, silk clothes, and



so on) are exposed. All kinsmen according to their means take part in the payment of the ransom. It is considered a great sin not to put in one's share. On the other side, the monies and goods obtained become the common property of the offended clan. Part of it supplies the valuable goods needed by the deceased in the realm of death, and the rest becomes a common fund for the family of the deceased and his clan.

The negotiations for ransom for the capture of a woman or offense to holy things are carried on in the same way with the help of a spokesman, but not quite so solemnly. The mediators discuss the matter in the presence of all the people, whose opinions are heard. The decision arrived at is considered to be the consensus of the entire meeting.

### ONE SIN

Although the religious customs and rules of conduct are the same for the whole tribe, every clan has a series of obligations and prohibitions all its own which apply only to its members. The sexual norms constitute the first, and widest circle of such prohibitions. Members of every clan are forbidden sexual intercourse with particular classes of women such as their clanswomen, the wives of younger brothers, all women called *imk*, and all women from the clan of sons-in-law. It is enough to know which women are prohibited in order to ascertain the clan they belong to. The restrictions on conversation can also be placed in this category. For members of every clan, there exist definite classes of persons with whom conversation is forbidden.

The religious norms, in a narrow sense, constitute yet another, third category. As we have seen, each clan has its own deities, sacrifices, sacred objects, beliefs, traditions, and rituals. These numerous ceremonies and cult objects require the greatest care and respect. The entire clan is responsible for each violation, or the wrath of the offended deities falls upon them. Therefore, the member of a clan must not only avoid any violation of taboo, but he must protect them also from violation by strangers. A penalty must be demanded for every offense. Hence the usual lawsuits for an accidental spoiling of a hearth's fence, for carrying out fire from the yurt, or for letting a bear's bone fall during the feast.

Finally, we must take into consideration that the term "sin" extends not only to the formal prohibitions, but also the obligation to realize all the positive norms of the clan. Then the formula "common sin" assumes a broad general meaning and becomes the expression of shared clan obligations. The significance of this principle is all the more simply important because for the Gilyak these obligations are not juridical formulae observed as punishment. They are religious imperatives rigorously observed for the sake of self-preservation. To the Gilyak there is no difference in prohibitions religious, sexual, or social in character; they are all religious. To observe these requirements means to care about the benevolence of deities, the removal of pitfalls emanating from all enemies in life, and so on. Not to observe these regulations means the ruin not only of the offender himself but of the entire clan. Hence it becomes clear why these norms are the cement that binds the clan. Often contradictory to human nature and requiring tremendous self-control, these norms are not regarded as compulsory but as if by the natural demands of instinct. Notice, for

instance, with what power sexual regulations function. In general, as regards sexual instinct, Gilyak men and women act freely upon their natural inclinations. There is no chastity before or after marriage. Care is taken only to avoid becoming a victim of jealousy. There is neither mention nor sign of sexual moderation. Still, the Gilyak maintains absolute chastity in relation to persons of prohibited categories. Incest is unknown and considered a monstrous phenomenon.<sup>24</sup> The same restraint is exercised in regard to conversation. Even being face to face with each other for entire days, brothers and sisters endure the torments of silence, communicating with each other only in cases of extreme need in the most businesslike manner. And yet the Gilyak are by temperament far from silent. To a considerable degree, such self-control is the result of education and training, but it would never have attained such a hold were it not for the common realization of the ruin each individual violation would bring to the whole clan [49].

Such are the basic characteristics of the clan, according to which it is possible to judge its comprehensive role in Gilyak life. The clan's hold on a man lasts from birth to death, filling his entire life. It surrounds him with the most intimate ties of relationship on the mother's and father's sides. It unites the living generations with all ancestors by the closest ties. It guarantees a man individual marriage as well as marital rights outside of it, and insures his widow and children after his death. It guards the life of a man and his family from strangers. The clan is ready to rise as a single man in defense of the rights of a kinsman or to answer for his guilt towards another clan. It feeds him when he is hungry, pays his debts if he is poor, and helps him in the payment of the bride-price and ransom.

In the benevolence of the clan deities and in the clan sacrifices, a man finds complete protection and the strongest guarantee of well-being. The clan is a school of moral education, duty, social cooperation, and self-sacrifice. Within it he finds his greatest joys, consolation, and the assurance of his felicity in the world after life.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> [**Editor's note:** Although the AMNH English typescript's translation for the Russian word *pre-ljubodeianie* was correctly given as "adultery," the context of sexual relations between prohibited categories renders the word more closely as incest.]

<sup>25</sup> [**Editor's note:** The concluding paragraph to this chapter, found in the AMNH Russian and the 1933 Soviet versions, is transposed in the AMNH English typescript and in this edition to the start of chapter fifteen.]