

The motif of rebirth in Mansi folk tales  
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For some reason, in recent years, the idea has been spreading outside academic circles that the concept of reincarnation has no place in the religions of Finno-Ugric peoples. It is true that we do not find the motif of reincarnation in the religions and folklore of many kindred peoples, but in some cases, it is quite clearly traceable. For example, the Mansi and Khanty believed that a person has multiple souls: one remains with the corpse after death and eventually turns into a beetle, one departs downstream along the river to the land of the dead, and one soul flies with the help of birds to a mythical southern land. These souls are associated with a person's body and shadow. The soul connected to breathing has the ability to be reborn. In Mansi birth customs, a ritual was practiced in which people tried to guess which recently deceased person's soul would give its soul to the newborn. In this context, I have heard the expression, "towards whom the child turns its head."

I have not found such a motif in the folklore of the Ob-Ugric peoples. However, Mansi legends contain a motif in which Siberian hogweed (*Heracleum sibiricum*) grows from the blood of a murdered Mos woman, and when a she-bear eats it, she gives birth not only to bear cubs but also to a human girl, who becomes the ancestor of the Por people. Mos and Por are exogamous clans or phratries among the Mansi. This motif is usually accompanied by a theme of incest between a brother and sister or suspicions of it. In some cases, the girl born from the bear remembers her previous life; for example, in one legend, she recognizes her son, whom she had left onto the river before the spring ice breakup out of fear of incestuous suspicions.

In the religions of the Mansi and Khanty, blood is indeed significant, carrying a person's life force, but there is no concept of reincarnation occurring through blood. Instead, it is the soul component associated with breathing that is reborn.