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'They have very, very little hope of a happy life after death'

Soon the whole New Testament will be translated into Buryat

In this issue we travel with our Swedish board member Sören Stadell to a remote little village in Buryatia, Siberia

"Atsagat is an exceptionally beautiful village"

"I shall just jot down some impressions from an ancient Siberian village close to the border with Mongolia and China. Atsagat is an exceptionally beautiful village. All the cottages, which are grey, are in a valley surrounded by mountains. Right at the edge of the village is a river, and the plains stretch from the village up towards the mountains. It's still morning, and daybreak paints the horizon a fiery red. All the village cows are gathered just above where I live. They stand and kick holes in the icy stream they're about to cross. They're thirsty and drink for a long time. They're unlikely to come across a stream

or spring during the whole day they're in the mountains. I know exactly where they're going. Yesterday Sergei and I acted as cowherds. That meant that the two of us were responsible for 150 cows from 27 cottages.

"More than 500 people live here. My prayer is that the men, who don't work but just spend their time drinking, and the children, who still know nothing about Jesus, and all the other villagers will come to see and understand who Jesus the Saviour is. But now let me explain how I came to be in Atsagat.

On the Trans-Siberian Railway

"Two brothers, Magnus and Erik Rosshagen, and I had set out on the trip to Siberia. (It was the fifth time for me, and the first for them.) They could spare only two weeks



On the Trans-Siberian Railway

– one for travelling and one in Siberia. I was to be away for two months. We travelled on the Trans-Siberian Railway in a carriage with forty people in the same open-plan compartment.

“We had arrived at Ulan-Ude in Buryatia. One afternoon Erik held up a guidebook and said: ‘Look! It says here that there’s a Buddhist museum where you may film as much as you like. It’s a bit to the east, towards the Mongolian border. Couldn’t we try to get there?’ The lads got hold of a car to take them. I did nothing because I wasn’t in the mood at the time to go to a museum. But there in the village of Atsagat I felt that this was the place for me to stay.

“They have very, very little hope of a happy life after death”

“Sergei and Zhenya have treated me as a son in their home. They are Buddhists like everyone else in the village. No one here is a Christian. No missionary has ever been to this village. This carries a great responsibility. I’m the first, and I’ve never said a word about being a missionary. I just wanted to come to Atsagat to make friends with the people and to learn as much as possible from the villagers here. And I particularly wanted to learn all I could about Buddhism, and I’ve done that. Besides Sergei and Zhenya, my best friend in Atsagat has been the lama, Chergall. We meet every day. He’s our neighbour, and sometimes he pays us up to three visits a day. We understand and listen to one another. He speaks of his concerns and seeks my advice. Every day the villagers come to Chergall with their worries. Three cows have been stolen. Our horse is injured. A child is ill. My son cannot sleep at

night. . . Many believe that when they die they will be born again as animals. They have very, very little hope of a happy life after death. Chergall and I are like brothers. He even wants to be prayed for and to learn the Word of God.

“Each week Sergei fires up the sauna so that it gets very hot. The boiler is full of hot water, and the large barrel beside it is filled with cold water. We mix the water until it’s comfortably warm and then we do the washing – first our working clothes, and then we scrub ourselves clean. Then we go inside, where Zhenya has

the dinner ready. All the food is the fruit of their own labour: potatoes, cabbage, greens, meat from their own pigs and other produce. They’re great cooks! I’ve eaten hardly anything that they themselves haven’t had a hand in producing. Each week the separator is brought out and we crank it, and out come the cream and the skimmed milk. And so we have cheese and other delicacies. There are certainly times when I feel as if I’m living a hundred years ago.

“We have been pilgrims walking through history”

“We also have a dog, Pollack, and the highlight for him is when Sergei sets off on a hike. Sergei and I have hiked for up to eight hours a day. He’s shown me where he was born and grew up, and I’ve had the chance to see for myself some notable places. Sergei has told me some gripping stories. I’ve imagined the incredible calamities, crises and difficulties that he and his family have experienced, but also the indescribably beautiful and great moments of their lives. Pollack has run back and forth and around us as we hiked with staff in hand. We have



‘Atsagat is an exceptionally beautiful village’



© Magnus Rosshagen

Sören and his 'family'

been pilgrims walking through history. Because I was like a son in their home they had said that I should be in on everything concerning their family. There have been weddings and rejoicing, there have been sorrows and great anxieties, so great that at times the Bible has been the only thing that could give me peace.

“As soon as I sit down and read the Bible I think of those around me. They must be very hungry. They have no Bible. No one has given them one.

“A people cannot be free unless they have the Bible in their language”

“I know now that it’s only through prayer that the people in this village can be saved. There is also something more – the Word of God. A people cannot be free unless they have the Bible in their language. The *Children’s Bible* will soon be published in Buryat. The translation of the New Testament is finished and is undergoing the various checking procedures. This is a great marvel.

“I’ve never got so close to a people as to the Buryats in Atsagat. I’ve even become personally involved in this

business of the translation and publication of the New Testament in their language because I’m on the Board of IBT. For years I’ve been able to follow the process, to experience the agony and the excitement, and have finally seen how this extensive and difficult work has been brought to a conclusion. What the Institute has done here can hardly be expressed in words. And again – it wouldn’t have happened without prayer.

“Could we make each other a promise? Am I being too forward if I ask for this? Could we promise each other that we will embark afresh on purposeful prayer for IBT? The tasks facing the Institute are wide-ranging. As the Buryat people receive their New Testament, the final touches are being made to several other translations. In addition, there’s a long list of work in earlier or later stages.

“Thank you for your prayers.”

Sören Stadell

Facts about Buryatia

Buryatia lies to the east of Lake Baikal, is as large as Finland and is mountainous. The Buryats are a Mongolian people, and their language is related to Mongolian. Half of the approximately 440,000 Buryats live in Buryatia, where they comprise about a quarter of the population. The Buryats are traditionally Buddhists or animists. In practice there is a lot of animism even among the Buddhists. In the country there are many Buddhist temples (called “datsan”).

Bible translation:

Mark’s Gospel (1996)

John’s Gospel (1998)

The New Testament is translated and is being checked; publication expected in 2006

Jesus, Friend of Children (1999)

Right now the first *Children’s Bible* is being printed.

A message from Moscow

Barbro Lindström, our information officer, is on study leave for six months. She sent the following e-mail: “Today was my first day at the Pushkin Institute! It’s fun, but I couldn’t sleep last night – it was just like starting school! The group consists of about ten people from Italy, Turkey, Spain, Venezuela, Singapore, Germany – and me. At the start there were just four of us, but eventually the others trickled in, one by one. So some have a laid-back approach – and it’s largely up to the individual what (s)he makes of such a course. But the teacher seemed good, and there are two more I have yet to meet. The classes

are between 09.30 and 15.00 with a 40-minute lunch break – the “stolovaya” (canteen) is good.

“It feels great and a luxury to devote myself entirely to the language! In addition, today I got my student card, which entitles me to free entry to some museums and discounts on entry to others!

“I call in at the office occasionally to check my e-mail and to meet colleagues. I travel past Leninskiy Prospect (near the office) on my way to and from the school, which is in Belyaev – then there’s a 15-20 minute walk. So it’s a long way, but that’s so with everything in this city.”

Barbro Lindström

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Thank you for your commitment to the peoples of the CIS in the past year

Project of the month

The Buryat *Children’s Bible* is being printed right now. It should be ready just in time for Christmas. What better gift for the children in Atsagat and other Buryat villages! Soon we will be able to prepare the New Testament for publication. Give your Christmas donation to support this project.

IBT published the following during September-November 2004

Khakass: John’s Gospel,
1-3 John and Revelation

Karakalpak: New Testament

Nogai: Four Gospels and Acts

Ossetic: New Testament

Tatar: John’s Gospel (reprint)

Chechen: Luke’s Gospel (reprint)

Udmurt: Jonah

Soon to be published:

The New Testament in Yakut, Acts in North Karelian, and Luke’s Gospel in Rutul.

Institute for Bible Translation

Institute for Bible Translation was founded in Stockholm, Sweden in 1973, its main task being to publish Bibles for “non-Slavic peoples in Slavic countries.” In the CIS 130 different languages are spoken. Since then we have worked on Bible translation in more than 80 of these languages. We have printed the Bible or portions of it in over 60 languages, including three whole Bibles, in Georgian, Moldavian and Tajik, and 19 New Testaments. We welcome your support for our continuing efforts in bringing the Word to those in the former Soviet nations. All peoples of the world should have the Bible available in their native language.

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IBT also has offices in Russia and Finland.

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