

**University of Selen Anthropological Memorandum 35**

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**Notes and Interviews by Senior Professor Telsik No-sek Ba'Vanyre.**

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At first glance, one wouldn't be blamed for viewing the polar continent of Tunca as totally devoid of life. It is an easy mistake to make on Selen. How often have we discovered a new archipelago, considering it untouched by Selenians until we find yet another uncontacted tribe, blissfully unaware of the events taking place in the stars over their heads? If we might find people nested into the coral of Atolli, and surviving in the hurricane-lashed south, why is it any surprise that strains of Selenians, already proven hardy, might survive and thrive in the coldest part of the planet?

Many of the tribes on Tunca are implants, groups that moved to the outer expanses of the ice-shelf in response to the expansion of industry to the south. Most have abandoned their exodus in recent years, leaving scanty villages behind. Still more are seasonal travelers, following the enormous schools of bluki that migrate to the north in the summer, becoming more sluggish while mating in the still-frigid water. A handful of tribes, however, fall into a third group; true natives, present on the icecap for a century at least. The An'nsi are one of these, and by far the oldest. Even their name is suggestive of their culture's venerability, linking to a millennia-old Selenian dialect, roughly translating to "Spear-backed."

Most cultures would break down and reform over such an expansive stretch of time. However, perhaps due to their relative isolation, the harsh nature of their environment, or the genuinely impressive effort put forward by leaders within their society, much of the root of what it means to be An'Nsi is intact. I have discovered this only through intensive effort to integrate and communicate with the tribe, making myself known to several of their nomadic groups, and doing what no other member of the university was willing to do; wintering

with an An'Nsi settlement through Tunca's six-month darkness. The fact that I am a Selenian, though not of their tribe, likely aided me. This has granted me a profound insight into an incredible people; insight that could be useful both in understanding the ancient roots that define a united Selenian heritage, and guiding our government's efforts in the north.

First and foremost, it is essential to understand that though the An'Nsi are a nomadic people, they fit none of the stereotypes one would associate with a roving band. First, their movements across the continent of Tunca are carefully dictated by astronomical and meteorological study of their environment, not simply by the movement of food sources. They follow the band of sunlight created by Selen's axial tilt as it circumnavigates Tunca over a six-month period, staying ahead of the "bleeding edge" of darkness by several dozen miles. Sticking to the edge of Tunca's three large ice-sheets, they are able to avoid the worst of the continent's chills during this period, allowing them significantly greater freedom of movement to gather food for the coming darkness, and prepare their shelters for their "bunkering" season.

These shelters help to further disprove the myth of savage nomads. There are no rudimentary tents to be found in An'Nsi settlements. Rather, their villages settle into crevices of ice dozens of meters deep, covered over by flexible patchworks of animal skin, fishscale, and cultivated sea-weed fiber. These rudimentary shells are sloped lee-ward, to protecting the shelters from the worst of Tunca's predictable windstorms, strong and frigid enough to skin a man and leave him frozen solid in mere minutes in light, and seconds in darkness. They would also develop significant build-up of snow, were it not for the rising heat of firepits beneath, radiating through the animal skin to create snowmelt for fresh water, while smoke escapes through the angled covering. These shelters are especially complex towards the far north and south of the icecap, where significant geothermal venting provided the An'Nsi with the opportunity to create warmer, more permanent structures. The two oldest and largest crevice-shelters can thusly be found on the far north and south points of the continental ice-sheet, distinct in the fact that they are occupied year-round. Planning and preparing a "cr-serit", as they are known by the An'Nsi, is no meager business. Rather, it is usually planned for from the moment that light breaks, undertaken by multiple nomadic groups that maintain contact with each other through the nomadic season. It is also through this system of contacts that An'Nsi prevent inbreeding; there are just enough tribes, held just close enough together, that their bunkering groups can be rotated

out. No one group will ever bunker with the same two or three groups more than once or twice in a generation.

Here, we are also confronted by one of the key problems of life on Tunca; limited nutrition. Ingenuity is required for a people to feed themselves on a continent where normal crops are entirely unable to grow, and most prey never sets foot. Moreover, sustaining a population with such limited resources is no easy feat. The An'Nsi adapted to this problem, once again, with a mixture of technological ingenuity and surprising societal deftness. First, the An'Nsi learned to construct the "spears" for which they are named, though the implements that they utilize are far closer to what we would consider to be a pike. On average about three to five meters in length, the hafts of these pikes are carved from the rib bones of giant mantas, normally hunted or scavenged from skeletons that wash up on Tunca's rocky, western coastline. In comparison to a traditional wooden haft (unavailable to ice-bound Tunca) a bone-haft, aged and dried, is both more flexible and less brittle, enabling a well constructed pike to last generations. Their tips are hand-shaped volcanic glass, strong and razor sharp, taken from the northern and southern vents. In comparison to the bone, which is rare and highly valuable, obsidian comes cheap, so the tips are purposefully designed to be replaceable, constructed with wickedly sharp barbs that can skewer small fish, stick inside larger mammalian prey, or even root for long bands of cultivated sea-kelp. In hunting, the pike is often supplemented by bone short-bows. Where the pike is labeled "narse" or "narti", 'lover' in their dialect of Selenian, the bow is called "narmek". In our modern terms, we would likely call it a 'fling'.

The pike and bow are fundamentally important in An'Nsi society. They are the most important tools utilized in everyday life, in hunting, as poles to navigate ice-flows, and as weapons for self-defense against other tribals or wildlife. A well-trained pike hunter on an "ice hunt" can skewer three or more fish in a single-thrust, often directly through centimeter-thick sheets of ice that border the central shelves. Among the An'Nsi, everyone is a hunter, or huntress; every man, woman, and child learning every facet of the art from the day that they turn five. Only after attaining mastery are they allowed to pursue individual vocations. Hunting with pike and bow, harvesting kelp for vegetative nutrients, and training in individual and group spars consumes much of the An'Nsi youth's childhood, alongside learning to cook, tan hide, weave gut-string, and inscribe the runes central to tribal records and communications.

Over generations, a long-lived pike becomes a centerpiece of a family or tribe, decorated with beautiful, intricate runes and lines of poetry that indicate the An'Nsi's deeply sensitive nature, despite their harsh landscape. It is also through the pike that revelations about their societal complexity, and the strength of their tribal leadership, can be observed. Through control of both the supply of manta bones and obsidian spear-heads, tribal leaders control the creation of new pikes, allowing them to shape how much a tribe can hunt in the day-light season, and preventing the "tragedy of the commons" type ecological disasters one might expect to come from a well-adapted tribal people. It is also noteworthy that, despite these restrictions, the An'Nsi seldom ever turn to modern technology, blasters in particular. The few kept by the tribes are used only in self-defense...and only ever against outsiders, seeking to take advantage of seemingly backward people.

All of these finds are interesting, in an academic sense. But, they underplay the central, driving power of my experience amongst the An'Nsi. They are not merely a well-adapted, ingenious tribe. Their leaders are not simply well-trained, or placed in good positions. They are a culturally complex people, belying our view of savage nomads, and even their typical description by Tunca's other natives as industrious, brusque, no-nonsense hunters. The An'Nsi are sensitive, creative, wonderfully adaptive, filling the cold of Tunca with a warm, familial hope, even in the deepest dark. The strength of their leadership is derived not only from societal adaptation, but a universal sense of ethnic, cultural destiny. There is a reason, after-all, that they train so often with pike and bow, individually and in formations, as if fighting men or monsters greater than their strength. There is a common root to many of their myths, their song, their art, the beautiful, poems hummed in low-voices as the hunters trawl the ice. In the deepest recess of the An'Nsi' memory, they speak of invaders, tyrants, and monsters that held them and their brethren in a prison of blood and fear. Their elders whisper of the war that their ancestors fought, pike in hand, to cast the old invaders down, amidst a united front of Selenians. And, they speak of the eventual return of these old 'gods', their rise from the prisons in which they were seals, or the graves in which they were buried. The An'Nsi believe this to be inevitable. And, they believe that it is their destiny as a people to rise to the challenge once again.

It is a cultural thread that can not be ignored. Too many tribes, from all across Selen, share the same mythological concept, the same patterns, even the same lingual roots. There is a thread that must be followed.

And you all should know how I feel about leaving stones unturned.

