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Mythological Image in Olonkho of the North-Eastern Yakut Tradition: Sacred Tree

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Abstract

The article discusses the problem of studying the North-Eastern tradition of the Yakut epic. This tradition is part of the Northern regional tradition of the Yakuts. At the moment, the problem of studying the Northern regional tradition remains open. The study was based on the works of P. Ergun, V.N. Toporov, L.V. Dmitrieva, I.V. Pukhov, N.V. Emel'yanov, L.N. Semenova and others. The images and semantics of the sacred tree in the Olonkho of the North-Eastern tradition are considered in detail. This image is characteristic for the 8 texts of the 14 considered Olonkho from momskiy, verkhoyskiy, abyiskiy and srednekolymskiy districts or Sakha (Yakutia) Republic local traditions. In Olonkho texts of studied tradition the sacred larch image is widespread. As the researchers note, the sacred larch image is the most archaic. Carried out a comparative analysis of the sacred tree in Olonkho from three traditions (Vilyui, Central and North-Eastern). The sacred tree descriptions in the three traditions had their own regional differences. As a result of sacred tree semantics comparison in Olonkho of three traditions had been revealed the following. In the Central tradition, the sacred tree does not reach the Upper and the Lower worlds. In the Vilyui tradition, the tree penetrates through the Middle world and reaches the Upper world, becomes the horse standing for the Supreme deity Ürüŋg Aÿÿ toÿon 'White Creator Lord'. In Olonkho of the studied tradition the top of the sacred tree goes to the Upper world and roots penetrate deep into the Lower world. In the middle world the tree Ál Lúk Mas appears as a center of the world and a sacred place. In the Lower world the sacred tree appears as a hook for the things of its Lord Arsán Tôlaya. The main results of the work allows to suggest that the sacred tree semantics in the Olonkho of this tradition is more interesting and distinctive from the Olonkho of other regional traditions.

Keywords: Turkic peoples, Epic of Turkic peoples of Siberia, Olonkho, Regional traditions, Northern epic tradition, North-Eastern tradition, Mythological images, Sacred tree, World tree, Ál Lúk Mas.

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Introduction

At the present stage the study of regional traditions of Yakut storytelling is relevant. Yakut researchers identify three areas of the epic traditions: Vilyui, Central, and Northern. Existence, plot and compositional structure, images of the Olonkho of the Vilyui regional traditions have been studied by A.A. Kuzmina. Form of existence, the main Olonkho images and motifs of one of Sakha (Yakutia) Republic district – Taatta district local traditions, which is part of the Central regional tradition, were researched by N.A. Orosina. The Northern regional tradition remains unexplored. This tradition consists of the North-Eastern and North-Western epic tradition. The North-Eastern tradition appears as a separate branch of the epic tradition of Yakut storytelling. This includes momskiy, verkhoyskiy, abyiskiy and srednekolymskiy districts local traditions. Works of local tradition storytellers from verkhoyskiy district, was recorded by political exiled and folklorist A.I. Khudyakov. In 1939-1941 the Institute of language and literature organized a folklore-dialectological expedition. Its staff, S.I. Bolo and A.A. Savvin visited the Northern regions of Yakutia, recorded and compiled the Olonkho texts of local traditions storytellers from momskiy, verkhoyskiy, abyyskiy and srednekolymskiy districts. The study of these Olonkho texts takes on a special value, as it will allow to reveal the peculiarities of the Yakuts Northern epic tradition. The article touches upon the issue of studying the mythological images of Olonkho in the North-Eastern Yakut tradition. We set a goal to identify the image and semantics of the sacred tree in Olonkho of the North-Eastern tradition in a comparative aspect.

The mythological image of the sacred tree (world tree, tree of life) is typical for many nations' mythology. It is a mythological archetype, a universal tree uniting all universe spheres. For example, in Egyptian mythology the acacia tree *lusaaset* was considered as the tree of life. Chinese mythology describes the tree of life, which includes the Phoenix and the dragon. The tree of life appears in Norse mythology as *Yggdrasil*, a massive ash tree or a yew. In Slavic mythology the Tree of life is a variant of the world tree, reflecting the idea of the biblical tree of life planted by God in Paradise. In the heroic epic of the Turkic nation of Siberia there is the world tree of *Bai-Terek* (Altai and Kyrgyz epics), the sacred tree with nine long branches is described in the Buryat epic, etc. "The Tree is a structure forming beginning in the Turkic picture of the world. Through this image and its allomorphs the whole space-time continuum is organized. Linking all spheres of life vertically, the tree serves as the axis of the world and its center. This is the reference point of coordinates, both temporal and spatial" (Traditional worldview of the Turks of southern Siberia, 1988, p.24).

Turkish researcher Pervin Ergün in his article examined the Yakut vision of the sacred tree *Ál Lúk Mas*. The researcher notes that the image of the *Ál Lúk Mas* tree is similar to the image of the world tree, which is typical for all world cultures (Ergün, 2005).

In the Soviet and Russian scientific sphere V.N. Toporov made a huge contribution to the study of the world tree. He wrote that "the ideal image of this vertical structure (the world tree) is the axis of the world. The world tree is vertically divided into three parts, which allows you to distinguish between the roots, trunk and branches; to coincide with each of its parts of a special class of living beings; use some formal techniques to distinguish between these three parts of the tree" (Toporov, 2010, p.326). L.V. Dmitrieva believes that the Universe division into three worlds and the presence of the sacred tree is a feature of Eastern Siberia people, which was based on a single philosophical and religious system of Tengrianism. "A clear three-dimensional zoning of the Universe, where each of the spheres is perceived, in turn, as visible and invisible, is an expressive feature of the mythological picture of the indigenous Eastern Siberia peoples world, formed on a single ideological basis of the philosophical and religious system of Tengrianism" (Dmitrieva, 2011, p.12).

In the Yakut Olonkho tree *Ál Lúk Mas* grows in Universe center and connects the three worlds (Upper, Middle and Lower). According to the mythological ideas of Yakuts, the branches of the sacred tree conform to the sky, the trunk with the earthly world, and the roots with the underworld. Yakut researcher I.V. Pukhov called *Ál Lúk Mas* the ancestral, majestic tree of life (Pukhov, 1962, p.35). Folklorist N.V. Emelyanov claimed that in Olonkho the sacred tree *Ál Lúk Mas* corresponds to the world tree in mythology and epic of other nations (Emelyanov, 1983, p.19). L.N. Semenova in her work "The Epic world of Olonkho: spatial organization and plot" considered the structure and semantics of the world tree: "like any sacred vertical, *Ál Lúk Mas* is the embodied concept of the world: each part of the tree is compared with a certain zone of mythological space. Its upper part (branches) is connected with the world of the celestial beings, as indicated by the traditional symbolism of the "pure heavenly birds" of the crane and eagle, as well as a direct reference to the Supreme deity *Ürüng Aýý toýon* (translated by S.V. Yastremsky as White Celestial Master). The lower part of the tree (roots) accompanied by a paraphernalia of the "underground" spatial sphere; for example, according to the above description, the roots of the sacred tree "had grown" to givers of cattle (mountain *túlégiaýtchýga*, "the giver of black-furred", i.e. cows) associated with the lower "earthly" environment". The researcher emphasizes the three-part model of the world tree (Semenova, 2006, p.36).

Hence, *Ál Lúk Mas* is a sacred tree that represents the axis of the world. We will adhere to the term "sacred tree" as Yakut folklorists.

The image of the sacred tree is typical for Olonkho texts of three epic traditions: Vilyui, Central and North-Eastern. In Olonkho texts of the Taatta district local tradition, which is part of the Central tradition, the sacred tree is depicted as an eight-branched tree connecting the three worlds. In this tree lives the spirit-land owner *Án Alaqchyn Qotun*. N.A. Orosina notes that "all living beings came to the sacred tree to gain new strength, became rest and quiet, after sitting in the shade of this tree" (Orosina, 2015, p.90). For texts of Olonkho of the Vilyui regional tradition characteristic images of the sacred birch *Ár Kuduk Qatyng*. Researcher A.A. Kuzmina emphasizes that "the image of the Sacred Abundant Birch in most cases is not described, but only mentioned, while in the Olonkho prologue of the Central regions every detail of the tree is necessarily depicted" (Kuzmina, 2014, p.95). The researcher assumes that "the image of the sacred birch appeared later than the image of the sacred tree, under the influence of shamanism, where the birch was a revered tree" (Kuzmina, 2014, p.96).

Research methods and methodology

The study is based on the fundamental works of the Russian researchers A.N. Veselovsky, V.Y. Propp, B.N. Putilov, V.M. Zhirmunsky, E.M. Meletinskiy, V. M. Gazak, V.P. Anikin, etc. Applied theoretical methods to study regional and local traditions of the epic, used by B.N. Putilov, U.I. Smirnov, L.V. Grebnev, S.S. Surazakov, P.A. Troyakov, U.A. Novikov, T.M. Sadalova, V.E. Mainagasheva, P.E. Efremov, D.A. Burchina, T.G. Basangova, E.E. Khabunova, V.V. Illarionov, T.V. Illarionova, A.A. Kuzmina, N.A. Orosina etc. In considering the mythological image of North-East tradition Olonkho used the theoretical principles of Russian and Soviet folklorists: S.S. Surazakov, S.U. Neklyudov, R. S. Lipiec, A.A. Burykin, etc., Yakut researchers G.U. Ergis, I.V. Pukhov, N.V. Emelyanov, N. I. Philippova, L.N. Semenova etc.

In the study of this topic was applied an integrated approach, including descriptive, comparative, structural-semantic and lexical-semantic research methods. In the analysis of phonetic variants of the sacred tree names was used lexico-semantic method. To identify the external description of the sacred tree, such research methods as descriptive, comparative are used. In considering the semantics of the sacred tree was carried out structural, semantic and functional analysis. At the research stage was carried out the work with

scientific literature, dictionary definitions, tables adding the translation of Olonkho into Russian language. It is worth noting that the original texts of Olonkho were independently translated by the author.

Next, we will consider the image of the sacred tree in the texts of Olonkho of the North-Eastern Yakut tradition.

Phonetic variants of the sacred tree name

In the studied tradition the sacred tree has 6 phonetic variants of the name. For example, the version of Ál Lúk Mas is typical for the texts of abyiskiy and srednekolymskiy districts local traditions Olonkho. Another version of the Ál Lúp mas is described in the momskiy district local tradition Olonkho. The next variant of Ál Kudukmas is found in Olonkho of the verkhojanskiy district local tradition. The sacred tree of Ál Saghaqdýp depicted in Olonkho of srednekolymskiy district local traditions.

Sacred larch Ál (Áÿ) Kuduk Tít is mentioned in three texts of srednekolymskiy district local traditions Olonkho. E.K. Pekarsky interprets epithet Álas follows: "not used independently, meets in expressions Ál Lúk Mas divine oak" (Pekarsky, 1958-1959, col. 62). The phonetic variant of the word Ális Ár. Let's look at this word in the dictionary of E.K. Pekarsky: "Áris the best of its kind, venerable, important, huge, pure, sacred, divine. Ár Mas – venerable, huge, tallest and strongest tree in the forest" (Pekarsky, 1958-1959, col. 126). So, the epithet Ál can be translated as venerable, important and huge. Now let's analyze the word Kuduk. Researcher A.I. Gogolev explains the meaning of the word Kuduk as follows: "we can try to derive the basis of the word Kuduk from the Indo-European vocabulary: in ancient Greek *kudos* – a word related to the language of epics (Homeric style); in ancient Slavic exist word *cudo*. The main common meaning of these words is "supernatural power". *Kudos* also means something that gives a deity, a divine gift" (Gogolev, 2002, p.24). Hence, Ál Kuduk Tít can be perceived as "divine, revered larch". Yakut folklorists note that "in the early period of Olonkho's development, the sacred tree was presented in the form of a huge larch or birch. With the subsequent development of Olonkho poetics the way of the sacred tree was complicated and became more mythologized image of Ál Lúk Mas" (Mighty Er Sogotoq, 1996, p.35). The most common variant of the sacred tree name in this tradition is Ál (Áÿ) KudukTít 'divine, revered larch'. It should be noted that nature of the Northern Yakutia is dominated by larch. Therefore, we can assume that the image of the divine larch is more archaic than other trees (birch, oak) in the image of the sacred tree.

Descriptions of the sacred tree

To identify regional differences in the image of sacred trees should be compared images descriptions in the texts of three epic traditions Olonkho (Table 1).

Table 1. Description of the sacred tree

Central traditions	Vilyui traditions	North-Eastern traditions
<p>Aghys saláláq <i>Ár Lúp mas dien</i> <i>Ananan aÿyllan æskébitebit</i> lit. 'the eight-branched tree Ár Lúp mas originated for purpose'</p>	<p>Aghys saláláq <i>Ár qatyng oburgu</i> <i>Alys únen taqsybyt</i> lit. "the eight-branched tree Ár qatyng grown"</p>	<p>Aghys saláláq <i>Ál lúp mas</i> <i>Üünen turar ebit</i> lit. "the eight-branched tree Ál lúp mas stays"</p>
<p><i>Qara kômús qatyryktáq</i> lit. "covered in black gold bark"</p>	<p><i>Ürüng kômús tóstáq</i> lit. "having a silver birch bark"</p>	<p><i>Kün öttö</i> <i>Kômús qatyryktáq ebit</i> <i>Yÿ öttö</i> <i>Altan qatyryktáq ebit</i> lit. "At the tree the lunar side is covered with copper bark and"</p>

		the solar side is covered with gold bark' (Olonko of Muoma, 2004, p.208).
<i>Ürüng kömüs tümeciléq</i> lit. "with silver sapwood"	<i>Kyhyl kömüs tümeljiléq</i> lit. "with gold sapwood"	
<i>Cugdárar tojúktáq</i> <i>Cungunúr</i> <i>Mutuktáq</i> met. "with singing and ringing branches" (Nyurgun Bootur, 2003, p.65)	<i>Otut künnük sirinen</i> <i>Oýgurmutuktáq</i> met. "With long branches lying on the area covered by 30 days length ride" (Sülejlin Bootur, 2011, p.9)	

These Olonkho texts describe the sacred trees of three epic traditions. Comparative analysis result revealed that the description of the sacred tree are present in all the traditions of the Yakut Olonkho. The most detailed description is presented in the Central tradition Olonkho. For example, in the text of Olonkho "Ala Bulkun" performed by T.V. Zakharov there are descriptions of wood, with up to 180 lines (Pukhov, 1962, p.35). Olonkho teller from Amginsky district of Sakha Republic U.G. Nokhsorov described the tree during 279 lines (Emelyanov, 1983, p.21). Epithet of the sacred tree – *aghys salálaq* 'with eight branches or eight-branched', typical for three traditions. Some epithets of the sacred tree are similar in both Central and Vilyui traditions. For example, there are such epithets: *ürüng kömüs tümeljiléq* 'with silver sapwood' (the Central tradition), *kyhyl kömüs tümeljiléq* 'with golden sapwood' (the Vilyui tradition). Next come descriptions of the sacred tree branches. In the Vilyuitraditions praised in song tree having *Otut künnük sirinen Oýgur mutuktáq* lit. "With long branches lying on the area covered by 30 days length ride". In the Central tradition branches are described as follows: *Cugdárar tojúktáq Cungunúr Mutuktáq* met. "With singing and ringing branches". In both examples the key word is the epithet *Mutuktáq* ('with branches'). Construction of the epithets are different in both traditions. Now consider description of the sacred tree in momskiy district local traditions Olonkho: "*Sêr sylgy Cêlléq kuturugun Tangnary tuppup kurduk Alys jerekén Ártygyn ürdütten Aghys salálaq Ál lúp mas Ýnen turar ebit. Yý öttö Altan qatyryktáq ebit, Kün öttö Kömüs qatyryktáq ebit.* lit. 'Like the upturned tail of the horse, motley eight-branched *Ál lúp* tree stays. The lunar side of the tree is covered with a copper bark, and the Sunny side is covered with a golden bark' (Olonko of Muoma, 2004, p.208). This text says that the *Ál lúp* tree has copper and golden bark. So, when describing the sacred tree mostly were used adjectives *silver* and *golden*. In Olonkho of the Vilyui traditions the sacred birch had silver bark and golden sapwood. In Olonkho of northeastern tradition, the sacred tree was covered with silver and golden bark. Thus, the three traditions of the Yakut Olonkho are characterized by descriptions of the sacred tree. The most detailed description is presented in the Olonkho of Central tradition. Silver and golden epithets were often used in the description of the sacred tree. These descriptions are similar in general terms, but have regional features.

The semantics of the sacred tree

Yakut researchers believed that "in Olonkho the sacred tree *Ál Lúk Mas* takes an established center of the "native land" of the hero. The sacred tree in the middle world is represented by the world center. This image in the Central tradition represents the bright beginnings of the Middle world and symbolize the unfading fertility of the earth and its eternal prosperity" (Kyys Debiliye, 1993, p.14). L.N. Semenova describes a similar semantics of the sacred tree: "The Image of a tree sprouted through three worlds with branches and roots bent to the middle points to the additional semantics of the world tree as a kind of

spatial bond connecting three epic worlds and providing stability of the epic cosmos" (Semenova, 2006, p.36).

Let us consider the semantics of the sacred tree on the example of Olonkho texts of three traditions (Table 2).

Table 2. Semantics of the sacred tree

Central traditions	Vilyui traditions	North-Eastern traditions
<p>The great tree <i>Ár-Lúp</i>, Spread wide its branches, Does not penetrate with tops of its To the edge of insatiable heaven, But extends the green canopy Above the expanse of middle earth. Eighty-eight its Thick poles-roots Do not sprout into the Lower world, But spread out in the thickness of the earth</p> <p>(Nyurgun Bootur the Swift, 1982, p.50)</p>	<p>In the middle of <i>Ürüng Äýý toýon</i> deity's courtyard near the horse standing rose up the top of the sacred tree`</p>	<p>Top of the tree became an honorary horse standing of the <i>Ürüng Äýý toýon</i> deity, and the roots became a hook in the Lower world for <i>Arsán Tôlaya</i>. Here is such a sacred larch called <i>Án Kuduk</i> had grown up in the middle of meadow.</p>

Analysis of the semantics of the sacred tree allows us to disagree with the statements of researchers that the sacred tree *Ál Lúk (Kuduk) Mas* is a compound of the three worlds and provides stability of the epic space. In the Central tradition the sacred tree does not reach the Upper and Lower worlds. In the text of Olonkho by P.A. Oyunsky "Nyurgun Bootur the Swift" provides the following example:

*The great tree Ár-Lúp,
 Spread wide its branches,
 Does not penetrate with tops of its
 To the edge of insatiable heaven,
 But extends the green canopy
 Above the expanse of middle earth.
 Eighty-eight its
 Thick poles-roots
 Do not sprout into the Lower world,
 But spread out in the thickness of the earth.*

(Nyurgun Bootur the Swift, 1982, p.50)

Translated to Russian by V. Derjavin.

This tradition describes that the top of the sacred tree does not reach the Upper world. Its branches curving overhang to the bottom. Further, the roots of the tree, bend to the top also not reaching the Lower world. The sacred tree connects all three worlds in mythological terms. In semantic terms, portrayed the ornament that displays the universe. In the Vilyui traditions the semantics of the sacred tree are quite different. Here the tree grows through, reaching the Upper world, becoming there the horse standing of Ürüng Aÿÿ toÿon deity 'White Creator Lord' (Süleljin Bootur, 2011, p.9).

In Olonkho of the North-Eastern tradition the sacred tree is depicted: "cannot be seen the top, cannot be seen the roots of standing eight-branched tree Ál Kuduk" (Álë Bergen, 2008, p.13). In another text of North-Eastern tradition Olonkho also described the sacred tree in detail: "Top of the tree became an honorary horse standing of the Ürüng Aÿÿ toÿon deity, and roots became the hook in the Lower world for Arsán Tôlaya. Here is such a sacred larch called Án Kuduk had grown up in the middle of meadow" (Olonkho of Srednekolymskiy district, 2016, p.158). As can be seen in the text, the crown of the tree Án Kuduk Tít serve revered horse standing for the Highest deity Ürüng Aÿÿ toÿon 'White Creator Lord'. The roots of the sacred tree became the hook for the Lord of the Lower world Arsán Tôlayä oghonhor 'old-man Arsan Tuolai'. Consequently, the top of the tree goes to the Upper world, and the roots penetrate deep into the Lower world. This semantics of the sacred tree in the studied tradition is interesting and distinctive from other regional Olonkho traditions. The Ál Lúk Mas tree becomes a sacred and revered place for the main characters, where the owners-spirits of the Middle world live. In the study of Olonkho tradition the following example is given: "Onno Bôllaghuna, toghôrus gynan toqtý tüspütüger, bír aghys saláláh Ál Lúk Mas turar ebit. Onno allarángngy mutugar bír kihi (Sérkén Sehen) oloror ebit" lit. 'Stays eight-branched Ál Lúk Mas tree, there on the underside of the branch sits one man' (Tomskaya, 2011, p.77). This text mentions the spirit master of the earth Sérkén Sehen Selbir Bytyk, who lives near the tree Ál Lúk Mas.

Conclusion

Thus, we have considered the image of the sacred tree in Olonkho of the North-Eastern Yakut tradition. In the studied tradition, the sacred tree has six phonetic variants of the name: Ál (Áÿ) Kuduk Tít (srednekolymskiy district tradition), Ál Lúk Mas (abyiskiy and srednekolymskiy districts traditions), Ál Lúp mas (momskiy district tradition), Ál Kuduk Mas (verkhoyanskiy district tradition), Ár Saghaq dúp (srednekolymskiy district tradition). In the Olonkho texts of studied tradition is widespread the image of divine (sacred) larch. As the researchers note, the image of the divine larch is more archaic. Description of the sacred tree was typical for all the traditions of the Yakut Olonkho. The most detailed description is presented in the Central tradition Olonkho. Silver and golden epithets were often used in the description of the sacred tree. These descriptions are broadly similar, but have regional differences. As a result of sacred tree semantics comparison in Olonkho of three traditions the following is revealed. In the Central tradition, the sacred tree does not reach the Upper and Lower worlds: the Top of the tree does not reach the Upper world, and its branches, bending, hang to the bottom, the roots of the tree, also not growing to the Lower world, bend upward. In the Vilyui tradition the semantics of the sacred tree is quite different. The tree permeates through everything: reaching the Upper world, becomes the horse standing for deity Ürüng Aÿÿ toÿon 'White Creator Lord'. In Olonkho tradition, the top of the sacred tree goes to the Upper world, and the roots penetrate deep into the Lower world. In the Middle world the Ál Lúk tree represents the center of the world and a sacred place. In the Lower world the sacred tree appears in the form of a hook for things of the Lord Arsán Tôlayä. This semantics of the sacred tree is the most interesting and distinctive from other regional traditions of Olonkho.

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