

A SYSTEMATISATION OF TRANSCRIPTIONS OF EARLY OLONKHO RECORDINGS ACCORDING TO PLOT PECULIARITY

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ABSTRACT

The article* presents the results of textual studies of the early recordings of the Yakut heroic epic Olonkho, recorded from the second half of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century. The relevance of the study is due to the fact that scientific research of the texts of the early recordings of Olonkho with full broadcasts of the plot is most widely, systematically carried out. At the same time, researchers today continue to pay less attention to early recordings of Olonkho, producing brief or incomplete schematic statements of content. A review of early texts on Olonkho shows that these reviews have incomplete, overly concise, summaries of the plot, although they do confirm the stability of the ancient thematic content, plot structure, motifs, and image system. The richness of the poetic language and the beauty of the style, and the surprisingly artistic content and archaic motifs, which can be seen even in translations, are of considerable value for establishing a full picture of the unique oral creativity of the Yakut people. This study attempts for the first time to systematise transcriptions of early recordings of Olonkho using a summary of the plot in Russian compared with a summary of the plot in the original language. The systematised texts will be used in a comparative study of Olonkho texts recorded in the 19th and 20th centuries. This analysis shows that there has been a transfer of plot with epic texts of the late period in order to maintain a degree of continuity, using both common and specific features to bridge between traditional and modern forms of Olonkho, taking into account regional and local features.

KEYWORDS: Olonkho • types of fixation • recordings • systematisation

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INTRODUCTION

Olonkho is a genre of Yakut heroic epic, a significant form of oral folk art with rich content, a reflection of the exclusively humanistic spiritual life and culture of the people. It glorifies the campaigns of the heroes, undertaken in the name of protecting their native land, saving the tribesmen from invasions by a tribe of evil monsters, the *Abaasy aimaga*. In this largest epic of Yakut folklore, the texts usually vary in size: the average number is 2,000–3,000 lines (short or ‘small’ Olonkho), others are 10,000–15,000 (‘large’ Olonkho). The “Alaatyyr Ala Tuigun” Olonkho, by Roman Petrovich Alekseyev from the village of Borogon in Ust-Aldan ulus, consists of 56,000 lines. Rich fantastic fiction and majestic images of ancient myths are combined with vivid realistic portrayals. The Yakut Olonkho is unique in its preservation of ancient epic plots, motifs, figurative system, and artistic language. In ancient Olonkho, heroes (bogatyrs) are brought down from the Upper World by celestial deities. The reason for the heroes’ military campaign is the kidnapping by the *abaasy* anti-hero of the girls of the Middle Earth. After going through various trials, the *aiyy* (according to mythology, *aiyy* are the inhabitants of the Upper world, the progenitors of the Sakha people) hero defeats his enemies in a terrible battle and marries the saved girl. The figurative system of Olonkho is also canonical: it contains representatives of *aiyy* and *abaasy*, mythological images of the goddesses Aiyysyt and Ieyiehsit, who patronise people, horses and cattle; the mythological characters of *ichchi* such as the fire spirit Khatan Temieriie, the owner of the Bayanay forest and horse-friend of the hero, etc.

Nikolay Vasil’evich Yemel’yanov studied folk epic literature and made a great contribution to the study of the Olonkho and its story plots. He created short Olonkho plot descriptions based on the materials he found in the archives fund of the Yakut National Centre of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The results of his research are reflected in his monographs *Plots of the Yakut Olonkho* (1980), *Plots of Early Types of Yakut Olonkho* (1983), *Plots of Olonkho about the Ancestors of the Tribe* (1990) and *Plots about the Defenders of the Tribe* (2000). In these works he first attempted to identify the principles of the Olonkho plot and outlined the system of plots in accordance with their stadial typology connected to the type of archaic heroic-epic narrative (Yemel’yanov 2000: 3). Without denying the influence of time on Yakut storytelling style, he managed to trace and detect the prominent genre features that make it completely different from other genres in its “ideological and thematic content, an established range of images, the stability of the compositional structure, the originality of their presence on stage and performing skills of the storytellers, the traditional style and visual effects” (Yemel’yanov 1980: 5). Yemel’yanov revealed the principles of plot formation in Olonkho. Based on these principles, he systematised the plots, subdividing them into three main groups with their own subgroups: the first group was devoted to the settlement of the descendants of Yurung Aiy Toyon (in Yakut mythology, the presiding god, the head of the Upper World, god of *aiyy* and the universe) in the Middle World and about female heroes, who were the first people of the Middle World. The second group is devoted to the ancestors of the Uranghai Sakha tribe (an obsolete Yakut self-designation). The third group is dedicated to the ancestors of the Uranhai Sakha tribe and their sons. The study of the themes, plotology, and figurative system of the

Yakut epic is carried out today based on Yemel'yanov's system, although more attention is paid to the records included in his classification, with a complete representation of the plot. The texts of Olonkho early recordings with an incomplete, concise presentation of the plot, remain out of the view of research. The little-studied issues of modern folklore include analytical characteristics by type of presentation, features of plot structure, and figurative systems of transcription of early Olonkho recordings. The author of this article studied and evaluated the value of records in modern science, conducted a review of themes, plots and stable motifs and studied the figurative system, including types of plot, in order to establish the preservation of Yakut traditions of narration in them. The uniqueness of these Olonkho texts lies in the fact that, despite their incompleteness, the plot outline, canonical motifs and the figurative system of the traditional Olonkho are preserved. The scientific value of these records lies in the preservation of authentic features, i.e. the continuity of the Yakut narrative of the traditional Olonkho. Systematised transcriptions of early Olonkho recordings will attract the attention of science and enter into scientific circulation.

ON THE HISTORY OF EARLY RECORDS OF THE YAKUT HEROIC EPIC OLONKHO

The Yakut heroic epic has reached us through oral transmission from generation to generation of illiterate but talented people. It is difficult to improve on what Yakutian writer Dmitriy Sivtsev (Suorun Omolloon) says about the historical and cultural significance of Olonkho:

Olonkho for the Yakut people is an encyclopaedia of the wisdom of their art and poetry. This is a museum where the diamond fund of poetic genius of this people is collected, all the peaks of their spiritual and material creation of the past. (Sivtsev 2003: 290)

From the middle of the 19th century, Yakut storytelling aroused the interest of Russian scholars and researchers. Alexander Theodor von Middendorff, Otto von Böhlingk, Richard Otto Maack, Ivan Aleksandrovich Khudyakov, Vaclav Leopoldovich Seroshevsky, Eduard Karlovich Pekarskiy and others made a great contribution to the preservation and perpetuation of unique early Olonkho texts.

The Yakut heroic epic was first recorded by the naturalist and academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences von Middendorff during his work between 1842 and 1845 on an academic expedition to the north and east of Siberia. The "Eriadel Bergen" Olonkho recorded by him was published in *A Journey to the North and East of Siberia* (see von Middendorff 1876). Von Middendorff transcribed the introductory part of one of the variants of the "Er Sogotokh" Olonkho in the Latin alphabet in the original language. The main content was written in a condensed form in Russian by von Böhlingk, who published it with a translation into German in *In the Language of the Yakuts* (see von Böhlingk 1851).

Maack, head of the first scientific expedition of the Siberian Department of the Russian Geographical Society to the Viluy District of Yakutsk Region in 1854–1855, in addi-

tion to his main scientific work, was also interested in Yakut folklore. The third volume of his foundational publication *Vilyuy District of the Yakut Region* includes recording of the Olonkho “Yakut Fairy Tale Told by the Yakut of the Srednevelyuysky Ulus on the Kurga River” (Maack 1887: 123–127). However, the Yakut folklorist Georgiy Ergis (1974: 30) considered the records of the Olonkho compiled by Maack to be unsatisfactory because of the incompleteness of the recorded plot. Nevertheless, as the earliest records they provide an idea about the peculiarities of plot and the language of the early Olonkho of the Viluy region, making these records truly valuable.

Folklorist, ethnographer, linguist and researcher of the Yakut language Sergey Vasil'yevich Yastremsky published in Leningrad in 1929 in *Samples of Yakut Folk Literature* a variant of Olonkho “Er Sogotokh”. This long Olonkho about the heroes of two generations was performed by the famous Olonkho performer (*olonkhusut*) Grigory Nikolayevich Svinoboyev (Meginsky nasleg of the Meginsky ulus) with the assistance of Yakutian public figure Aleksey Petrovich Afanasyev.

A great effort in the preservation of the Yakut heroic epic was made by Russian folklorist and researcher Khudyakov, who was exiled to Verkhoyansk in the Yakutsk region between 1867 and 1874. Khudyakov was author of *The Verkhoyansk Collection*, posthumously published in Irkutsk by the East Siberian Department of the Russian Geographical Society in 1890. Khudyakov was first to point out that the Yakut Olonkho performer presents a whole epic in narrative and song form that describes many events, gods, devils, heroes, and different places. His record of the full text of the major Olonkho “Khaan Dzhangystai” in the Yakut language was published in 1918 (Khudyakov 2016: 289). This Olonkho tells of the military campaigns of three generations of *aiyy* heroes. It has preserved the ancient stable compositional frame and figurative system, as well as the peculiarities of the language, and is now studied from different perspectives in accordance with modern research methods. Together with “Khaan Dzhangystai”, three more shorter Olonkho were published: “The Old Man Uranikaan”, “The Old Man with the Old Woman” and “Bert Khara”. Khudyakov, who studied Yakut folklore while subject to the inhumane conditions of Siberian exile, introduced the early texts of the Verkhoyansk Olonkho to the academic society. His *The Verkhoyansk Collection* (Khudyakov 1890) made a great contribution to acquainting a large scope of Russian readers and inquisitive people with the Yakut Olonkho.

Between 1907 and 1918 Pekarskiy published a three-volume academic publication *Samples of Yakut Folk Literature*, which included Yakut folk tales and songs, legends, proverbs and sayings, riddles, and Olonkho texts. Pekarskiy also compiled and edited volume 7 of *Samples of Yakut Folk Literature* (1929), including folklore materials collected by Yastremsky. Altogether only 24 Olonkho were published in *Samples of Yakut Folk Literature*, mostly recorded in Tattinsky and Verkhoyansk uluses (including the texts of nine completed large Olonkhos).

The early Olonkho texts from the Viluy region were preserved owing to records compiled by Maack, in the Verkhoyansk region by Khudyakov, in the Central region by Pekarskiy, Yastremsky, etc. Therefore, we can study the early texts of the Olekminsky ulus from the records of the early Olonkho texts compiled by the participant of the People's Will movement in Russia, the famous Siberian archaeologist, ethnographer and archivist Mikhail Pavlovich Ovchinnikov. While in exile in the city of Olekminsk,

Yakutsk Oblast, he studied the history of the old Russian and Yakut populations and collected valuable materials on archaeology, history, ethnography, shamanism and folklore. In addition to his main works, he was interested in local Yakut folklore. He published the texts of the “Bogatyr Sordokhai” Olonkho in Russian (Ovchinnikov 1904) and “The Tale of the Yakut Bogatyr” Olonkho (Ovchinnikov 1897). On the subject, plot, system of images, names of heroes (father and son), this is the text of one of the early Yakut heroic legends. The text tells of the combat adventures of a hero named Erbyakh-yurduger-settete-erter-erbekhte-bergen and his son, nicknamed the Youngest Son of the White God. The father and son fight against devils – *abaasy* – for the creation of a family hearth. According to the classification by Yemel’yanov (1980), this Olonkho can be attributed to “the ancestors of the tribe and their sons” subgroup of the “the ancestors of the Uranghai Sakha tribe” group. Unfortunately, Ovchinnikov (1897) did not indicate from whom or by whom the text was transcribed, or who translated it.

In this regard, we cannot judge the Olonkho performer himself. The merit of the first collectors and researchers of the Yakut Olonkho, who recorded the early Olonkho texts in the form in which they were presented in those distant times, was enormous.

Since 1935, the staff of the newly created Institute of Language and Culture under the Council of People’s Commissars of the Yakut Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic began conducting folklore dialectological expeditions and purposeful work to collect and preserve folklore materials. Special importance was focused on the Olonkho. Researchers of the Yakut epic during the Soviet period, such as Aleksey Kulakovskiy, Platon Oyunskiy, Gavril Ksenofontov, Aleksey Okladnikov, Sivtsev, Innokentiy Pukhov, and Ergis and Yemel’yanov introduced above, paved the way for the initial stage of scientific study of the Olonkho epic, introduced into scientific society a huge number of collections and unique material. In the studies of those years there were differing opinions on the historical origin of the Olonkho and on the fundamental plot lines of the epic narrative. At this time the entire fund of the Yakut Olonkho was also systematised and classified according to type of plot; comparative study with the epics of the Turkic-Mongol peoples was carried out and their typological and genetic relationships were established.

During the post-Soviet period the field of research has significantly expanded and new scientific trends have appeared and are developing, for example linguistic and folkloristic studies, ethnomusicology, traditional textual criticism, etc.

SYSTEMATISATION OF EARLY TRANSCRIPTIONS OF OLONKHO BY PLOT TYPE

“**The Immortal Knight**” (“Yolbet Bergen”) was recorded in 1886 from Olonkho performer Nikolay Alekseyevich Abramov-Kynat (Dzhuleiskiy nasleg of the Tattinsky ulus). According to Yemel’yanov’s classification, the Olonkho belongs to the group that deals with the defenders of the *aiyy* and Uranghai Sakha tribes. The Olonkho was published in *Samples of Yakut Folk Literature* (Pekarskiy 1908a).

Briefly, the Olonkho adhere to all the traditions of Yakut storytelling. Bai Harakhan Toyon and Kubay Khotun, with nine daughters and nine sons, live wealthily and hap-

pily in the vast ranges of the White Valley. An Aar Kuduk Mas (according to Yakut mythology, a sacred tree of abundance that grows in the centre of the Universe and connects all three worlds), a house, a courtyard, a home decoration and dishes are colourfully described. The shaman girl Aytalyn Kuo, daughter of Harakhan, has a dream that serves as a message or a warning, according to which the bogatyr Ogo Tulaayakh is her betrothed husband. She sends her brother to Ogo Tulaayakh. The motifs of the matchmaking of the *abaasy* hero Tong Dorooldzhun, the heavenly bogatyr Haardzhyt Mohsogol, and the bogatyr of the *aiyy* Adzhy Budzhu wanting to get married to Aytalyn Kuo, whom Ogo Tulaayakh defeats in battle, are all described. Ogo Tulaayakh and Aytalyn Kuo arrange an Ysyakh (the ancient Yakut festival of worship of *aiyy* gods) in honour of the wedding. In the further development of the plot, while Aytalyn Kuo swims in the salty reservoir, the *abaasy* bogatyr Duodaan kidnaps her and takes her through the sea to his dark country. Ogo Tulaayakh sets off in pursuit, but being wounded in battle, he is forced to leave. In the absence of Duodaan, Aytalyn Kuo gives birth to a son, Yolbet Bergen, who grows incredibly fast. In a further plot development, this boy's fantastic adventures are described. The nimble, fast Yolbet Bergen runs away from the *abaasy* heroes three times, turning into a red fox or a falcon. In battle, he kills the hero Duodaan and goes to Sabya Bai Toyon, the father of the beautiful Kyun Kuyaaryma Kuo, who asks that he get rid of unwanted guests – the *abaasy* heroes. Yolbet Bergen defeats the devils in battle. Happy Sabya Bai Toyon wants Yolbet Bergen to marry any of his daughters that he likes. But Yolbet Bergen decided that he will let them marry his uncle, and he would choose a wife from another area and set off to free the beautiful Analdzhyima-Meneldzhyime Kuo, from the claims of an unwanted groom – the son of Ulu Toyon of the devil Uluya Botur. On the way, the *aiyy* bogatyr receives a blessing from the spirit mistress of the sacred tree Aar Kuduk Mas, who gives milk to be sucked from her breast, which is how Yolbet Bergen gains the strength to defeat the Uluya Botur. Grateful for the salvation of his daughter, An Burai marries his daughter Analdzhyima-Meneldzhyime Kuo to Yolbet Bergen and arranges an Ysyakh in honour of the newlywed couple. Olonkho ends with a description of the arrival of the *aiyy* bogatyr with his wife in his homeland. The Olonkho describes the customs of the Sakha people. People who are grateful for their salvation build three yurts of mogul and a fire for the newlyweds, then they arrange an Ysyakh. The honourable guest-hero is met at the hitching post and is helped off the horse. The owner asks where the young man is from, and he is solemnly presented with three wooden cups for drinking kumis (fermented mare's milk). The heroes began to live a happy, rich life. A brief summary of the Olonkho plot reveals many traditional motifs of the Yakut Olonkho: descriptions of the beautiful countryside of Harakhan Toyon, the birth of a hero, kidnapping of an *aiyy* woman by an *abaasy* bogatyr, battles between the *aiyy* and *abaasy* heroes, and the marriage of heroes. The topics of matchmaking and the protection of the *aiyy* tribes from attack by the *abaasy* heroes are found throughout. There are motifs of the dream messenger, who comes in the form of the spirit-mistress of the sacred tree Aar Kuduk. Among the common epic motifs, there is no motif for the creation and settlement of the *aiyy* tribes of the Middle World (usually given as a description of how the heroes appeared), and no horse motif. Despite omitting some motifs, this version (Pekarskiy 1908a) presents the full plot of the type.

“The Old Man Kukul-Bogo and the Old Woman Siliriken” (“Kyul-kyul Siliriken emehsin”) was self-recorded by the Tattinsky region Olonkho performer Mariya Nikolayevna Androsova-Ionova (1864–1941) and, therefore, perhaps, existed in the Tattinsky local epic tradition. The text was published in *Samples of Yakut Folk Literature* (Pekarskiy 1909: 90).

The plot describes the life of the old man Kukul-Bogo and the blind old woman Siliriken, and her daughter Beibelzhin-Kuo. The girl marries the bogatyr Ereidekh-Buruydakh Er Sogotokh. On the wedding night, the *abaasy* bogatyr of the Upper World, Kogul-bogo, suddenly appears and forcibly kidnaps Er Sogotokh’s wife. Having mastered Beibelzhin-Kuo, he abandons her. Arriving at Er Sogotokh’s homeland, Beibeldzhin-Kuo gives birth to a daughter, Aytalyn Kuo. In a further development of the plot, the fate of Aytalyn Kuo, as noted by the Yakut researchers Ksenofontov, Pukhov, Evdokiya Innokentiyevna Korkina and others, is very similar to the fate of a simple Yakut woman, even the fate of the Olonkho performer Androsova-Ivanova herself. In the image of the bogatyr Hallan Uola Harylla-Mohsogol we can trace the likeness of Pekarskiy. The fact of her acquaintance with Vsevolod Mikhailovich Ionov is reflected in the history of the bogatyr Zhuluontai-bergen. Although the Olonkho has some features of real historical events, the events are narrated in the generally accepted traditional style and form of the Yakut Olonkho. Composition, plots, widespread use of basic obligatory epic formulas, epic characters, and figurative forms of speech fully comply with Olonkho traditions. The presence of recognisable historical features, symbols of an era, even the autobiographical descriptions in it do not diminish the value of this Olonkho as one of the earliest records of Olonkho, which has features of narration of the central region of Yakutia.

“Bogatyr Sordokhai” was recorded in 1889 by Ovchinnikov in Olekminsky district. He had little knowledge of the Yakut language and his free retelling of the story was published in Russian (Ovchinnikov 1904). Initially, the text was in the Yakut language. The recording of the Olonkho was given to Innokenty Gabyshev, a teacher at the foreign school, for interlinear translation from Yakut into Russian, but not returned. Apparently, Gabyshev was fluent in two languages and so his interlinear translation turned out to be adequate.

There are no records about the Olonkho teller, but because the Olonkho ends with the words: “I can’t say anything further about this Olonkho, the old man Symaky wants to sleep”, we can assume that, perhaps, here we are referring to an Olonkho performer by the name of Symaky. There is a sense of confusion in the definition of the genre: while at the beginning it is called “Urankhai Sakha Olonkhoto”, a footnote says “The Tale of an Unreasonable Yakut” (Ovchinnikov 1904). Here it would be appropriate to refer to Pukhov (2004: 16), who wrote that in the pre-revolutionary Russian editions, the Olonkho was mistakenly called a fairy tale, and the Olonkho performers were storytellers, although the people themselves differentiated between the two.

The “Bogatyr Sordokhai” Olonkho adheres to the tradition of Yakut storytelling: there are traditional motifs such as being set in the time of epics, descriptions of the homeland, the hero’s possessions, descriptions of the hero, a talking heroic horse, a miraculous transformation of heroes, matchmaking, confrontation between a man – the hero – and the inhabitants of another world (the *abaasy*), the appearance of a messen-

ger, the departure of the hero who protects the inhabitants of earth, obstacles, terrible images of the *abaasy*, the release of the girl from the unwanted groom, the marriage of the hero to the beauty whom he had freed. Of the repeated epic traditional mythological images, the Ar oak tree (Aar Kuduk Mas variant) and the hitching post (although it is oak) appear. There are no images of the upper deities, the *ichi* spirits. A violation of the Yakut storytelling tradition is revealed in that the main part of the Olonkho – a description of the battles of the *aiyy* bogatyr with the *abaasy* demons – is missing. There are points where the plot is mixed with the tradition of the Russian fairy tale. During the adventures of the bogatyr various motifs appear, such as glass and amber roads, a marble mountain, a golden ball, Russian food, wine, a painted chair, a girl's silver scissors with the inscription "Your husband is an invincible bogatyr Sordokhai", the girl's golden curls. Despite these violations of Olonkho traditions, "Bogatyr Sordokhai" with its epic content, the development of events, recurring epic heroes, motifs, is undoubtedly an early Olonkho text written by Ovchinnikov in Gabyshev's translation (Ovchinnikov 1904).

Full Records of the Olonkho in Russian

"**The Tale of the Yakut Bogatyr**" existed in the local Olekminsky epic tradition and was recorded in 1889 in the Olekminsky district by Ovchinnikov. The original recording of Olonkho was given to foreign school teacher Gabyshev as a subscript translation from the Yakut language into Russian, but was never returned. It was published in 1897 in the form of a free retelling by Ovchinnikov, who knew little Yakut.

According to the subject, the plot, the system of images, the names of the heroes (father and son) this is a transcription of one of the early Yakut heroic Olonkho. It tells about the combat adventures of a hero named Erbakh-yurdyuger-seti-erter-erbakhtay-bergen ('Rotating seven times on the thumb of Erbakhtay Bergen') and his son, nicknamed the Youngest Son of the White God. Both heroes are fighting against the *abaasy* for the creation of a family hearth. Despite the presence of fairy tale motifs, the plot describes canonical epic motifs of an elderly childless married couple begging a sacred birch tree for a child, the miraculous appearance of the future hero, naming him with a heroic name, the battle of the hero with devils, a hero werewolf, the release of women abducted by the heroes of *abaasy*, the revival of the dead hero with living water, the marriage of the heroes, the victory of the *aiyy* heroes over the *abaasy* heroes, the return of the heroes to their homeland.

The presence of elements of Russian folk tales in the Olekminsky Olonkho is the result of much spiritual and cultural contact between the Russian and Yakut peoples, who have lived side by side in the same region for many years. The style of telling about the heroic adventures of a bogatyr named Erbyakh-yurduger-settete-erter-erbekhtey-bergen and his son, the Youngest Son of the White God, testifies to the fact that this is undoubtedly an early Olonkho text (Ovchinnikov 1897).

"**The Tale of the Mighty Bogatyr Kis Sangyakh and His Son Bardam Sanalakh**" was recorded and published in 1890 by Vasiliy Priklonskiy in the book *Living Antiquity* in Russian. The traditional plot of the Olonkho is described as follows: the terrible Raven stole the future bogatyr Kis Sangyakh and brought him to his master Hara Chogoi. Kis

Sangyakh's son Bardam Sanalakh goes to look for his father. The Raven wins the battle. The matchmaking of a young bogatyr closely resembles the fabulous motif of a silk ball leading the hero to his future wife. With a beautiful wife and the resulting wealth, the hero returns to his father's house, the mother joyfully arranges a feast for glory. Since then, young and old people have healed calmly and happily. The traditional motifs of a son saving his father and the matchmaking of a bogatyr are highlighted.

"The Yakut Tale Told by the Yakut of the Srednevelyuisky Ulus on the Kurga River" was recorded by Maack in Russian in 1854–1855 with the help of assistants. It was published in *Viluy District of the Yakutsk Region* (Maack 1887: 123–127).

According to the text published by Maack, Yemel'yanov wrote an Olonkho plot and published it in his monograph under the title "Kogul Bogo", including it in the group titled "Founders of the Uranghai Sakha Tribe", which relate to battles between demons and the heroes Kogul-Bogo, his son Kundumei-Berkhen and his nephew Kugutu-bogon Ytyk Syrgystanko. Among the ancient epic motifs, there are motifs of the miraculous birth of the hero Kogul Bogo from the old man and the old woman, the kidnapping of the sister by the evil *abaasy* from the bogatyr Ytyk Syrgystanko, the battles of Kugutu-bogo with the Bird bogatyr and victory over him, the victory of Kundumei-Berkhen over the bogatyr *abaasy* Munkhalakh-wola-bolhahjin and his sister Baba Yaga, the victory of Kugutu-bogo over the Eight-headed demon, the battle between father and son, uncle and nephew, and cousins, none of whom recognise each other, the matchmaking of the brothers Kundumei-Berkhen and Kugutu-bogo with the daughters of Harakhan Toyon, the battle of the brothers Kundumei-Berkhen and Kugutu-bogo against the youngest daughter of Harakhan Toyon, in which Kundumei-Berkhen kills his brother Kugutu-bogo, and the reviving of the killed Kugutu-bogo by a shaman. The Olonkho ends with the marriage of heroes and the establishment of a happy, peaceful life in the Middle World. The full story of the Olonkho is told with a description of the many battles of *aiyy* heroes against *abaasy* demons, and battles between *aiyy* heroes.

"Ulumnu the Young" was published by Priklonskiy in *Living Antiquity* in 1891. According to Yemel'yanov's classification, it belongs to the Olonkho type that deals with ancestors and parents of the heroes, a Yakut heroic epic that existed in the local central epic tradition. At the time of this Olonkho, in which the bogatyr Ulumnu Uolan lives a happy, rich life with his three beautiful sisters, the earth was as large as "the bottom of a birch bark *tursuk*", and the sky was as large as a "deer's ear" (Priklonskiy 1891: 139). At the same time, the earth and sky grow together with the growth of the hero himself. There is a motif of the messenger, from which the plot of Olonkho begins, the matchmaking of *abaasy* (the spirit-master of the South Sea Wat Waran) for the hero's sister, the battle of the *aiyy* hero and the *abaasy* hero. There are Olonkho that differ from the motifs of many: in the motif of the battle, *abaasy* blinded the *aiyy* hero and took his sisters away, which the hero discovered only in the evening when his vision returned to him. When he caught up with *abaasy*, he disappeared, turning into fire. Traditional motifs are the battle of Ulumnyu Uolan with *abaasy* Arsan Duolai and the victory over him, the release from captivity of the shaman Nyurgustai, the marriage of the hero to her, the defeat of the hero Ulumnyu Uolan, the birth of his son Yuelen Dokhsun, who swam across the Fiery Sea, turned into an iron fish, killed Timir Bargy (the enemy of his father), a snake and took out of the *abaasy*'s stomach the bones of his father and revived him with the help of living water. The end of Olonkho is also traditional: Yuelen Dokh-

sun turns into an eagle, put his father on his back, flew over the Fiery Sea and brought his father to his mother. A great feast was held. They all went to their homeland, where their farm and herds of cattle were waiting. Ulkumnyu Walan married his son to Harah Haan's daughter. All of them became the ancestors of the Yakuts.

"Er Sogotokh" is one of the versions of the widespread legend about Er Sogotokh. The first Olonkho recording was made in memory of Afanacy Uvarovsky at the request of the Academician von Böhlingk and published in his *On the Language of the Yakuts* (Böhlingk 1851: 79–95).

According to Yemel'yanov's classification, this Olonkho belongs to the group relating to the ancestors of the Uranghai Sakha tribe. There is the clear motif of the lonely hero, Er Sogotokh, who does not know where he is from. There are motifs describing the appearance of a hero, his wealth, home, courtyard, sacred tree, nature, weapons and riding horses; there are also the topics of matchmaking and courting the bride and the fight between the bogatyr Er Sogotokh and the *abaasy* Bura Dokhsun. There is an archery competition, and a battle using battle axes and spears. Er Sogotokh is mortally wounded and healed with the water of life. There is also a scene depicting the victory of an *aiyy* hero, Er Sogotokh sacrifices the body of the enemy, Er Sogotokh marries the daughter of Harakhan Khotun, the *aiyy* bogatyr returns home with his wife and her one hundred relatives, and finally Er Sogotokh lives happily and becomes the ancestor of the Uranghai Sakha.

Full Records of the Olonkho in the Original Language

"Shaman Girls Uolumar and Aigyry" is a small Olonkho by Nikolai Tikhonovich Abramov from Dzhuleisky nasleg. A recording in the prose form was made according to the narrator Pekarskiy in April 1886 and was published twice: in *Samples of Yakut Folk Literature* (Pekarskiy 1908b) and *The Olonkho of the Dzhuleisky Nasleg* (Pekarskiy 2013: 126–224). The Olonkho takes place in the Boturussky (now Tattinsky) ulus. The Olonkho tells the story of two Udagan sisters (shaman girls) who live together in a country rich in birds and animals, where winter never comes. The plot of Olonkho is somewhat different from the traditional one, since the main character is the eldest son of the Udagan women, Uolumar, who herself escapes from the *abaasy* demon who abducted her. She also finds a husband for herself and a husband for her younger sister Aigyry. After marrying their betrothed, the Udagan women give birth to sons. Further, the story is about a half-man half-*abaasy* named Suodalba, who becomes an assistant in the upbringing of the sons of the Udagan women. This hero goes through many tests in order to get brides for his pupils. After the marriage of the sons of the Udagan women, Suodalba asks Uolumar to marry him to her daughter. Having received a refusal from the Udagan women, he kidnaps the girl and settles in another country. The husbands of the Udagan women make an attempt to take the girl away, but after hearing the threat of Suodalba, they return. This concludes the text of the entry, there is no traditional conclusion to the Olonkho, i.e. a Ysyakh festival. The Olonkho with the main Udagan heroines are also found in other epic traditions, but according to the peculiarities of the development of the plot and the action of the heroes, this Olonkho is a special work of art, making it a valuable written record.

“Elik Botur and Nihil Botur” was recorded in 1886 at the request of Pekarskiy from the words of the Olonkho performer Nikolai Tikhonovich Abramov by educated local resident Roman Aleksandrov in 1896. It was published in *Samples of Yakut Folk Literature* (Pekarskiy 1910). According to Yemel’yanov’s classification, it belongs to the type of Olonkho that deals with the ancestors of the Uranghai Sakha tribe.

When the cripple bogatyr Myuldzhuruibet Muldzhu Bogo (‘the unshakable Myuldzhu Bogo’) dies, Elik Botur is born from his elder wife, and from his younger wife Nihil Botur. Mothers inform their sons that their horses are with Mistress Silliem. The boys decide to follow the horses. Mothers bless their sons. Nihil Botur defeats the man in silver clothing, kills Uot Usutuma, the spirit of the sea Alyp Sorennuokhai. The brothers find their horses by the frozen sea. Nihil Botur chooses a black horse, Elik Botur gets a spotted horse. The brothers organise races. The Nihil Botur’s horse wins. The brothers sleep three nights and three days at the Sacred Tree. Elik Botur marries the daughter of Togoruya Bai Toyon, whose name is Syrkyabalan Kuo, who falls into a bag with her soul. A celebration is held in honour of the winner, who becomes the groom. The next morning, the hero Khabydal the Black Bogatyr appears to take away Syrkyabalan Kuo. The battle begins, on the third day Elik Botur wins. Further, the motifs of the arrival of the huge hero Kalimse Hara with the news of the father of the bogatyr Black Hara are described, with Elik Botur waiting for the bogatyr of the Lower World Sataga Mogoi, as are the motifs of saving Sataga Mogoi’s hero when he is struck with a whip, Elik Botur caught by a horse, Nihil Botur’s treatment of his brother’s body (reviving it with the water of life), the murder of Black Hara. Elik Botur brings the beautiful Syrkyabalan Kuo to his brother. Nihil Botur’s matchmaking campaign begins. On the way, he kills the woman of the Lower World, Uot Kuohalis and fights with the hero Tallang Mengiye Hohtuya Suorun for three days and three nights. The battle is stopped by the *aiyy* tribes. The three Kun Chollut brothers advise the hero to marry. Nihil Botur calls his horse and sets off. At the Taas Dzhalkyr Mangan River, he meets a beautiful woman who calls out to him to marry her, next the woman calls on him to fight. Nihil Botur wins. This time Kyrytynai Tykaray reports that he must now fight her and her brother, the bogatyr Ogo Tuigun. Nihil Botur and Ogo Tuigun wrestle, then race, but neither of them wins. Bogatyr Ogo Tuigun agrees to give his sister away to Nihil Botur. Three days later, the newlyweds mount their horses and set off to the west. On the way, Kyrytynai Tykaray fights with the evil *abaasy* for three days and three nights, wins, then the husband and wife fight another evil *abaasy* for nine days and nights and kill him. His body is burned and the ashes thrown into the Great Sea. In a battle with Aan Durai, Nihil Botur turns into a heavenly bird, his wife turns into a falcon, soars up and, diving down, cuts off eight heads of the *abaasy* demon. Kyrytynai Tykaray and Nihil Botur bury the *abaasy* hero. The husband and wife mount their horses and come home. The elder brother greets them with a blessing. He built a house for them, increased their livestock. The mother and Elik Botur with his wife meet Nihil Botur and Kyrytynai Tykaray, having arranged an Ysyakh in their honour. Everyone lived happily ever after.

The beginning of the “**Descendants of Yuryung Aiyy Toyon**” is according to Maria Androsova-Ionova performed by herself. It is published in *Samples of Yakut Folk Literature* (Pekarskiy 1907a). According to the content, the text can be divided into two plot parts. In the first part, the tale tells of how the milky-white Yuryung Aiyy Toyon, who lived with his wife Azhynga Sier on the lower edge of the Eight-Layer Heaven, on the upper side of the Three-Layer Heaven, in a country with a never-setting sun, determined the place of residence for his nine sons and eight daughters. The children owned a large number of people, the ulus Kun Dzhelut, the relatives of whom were Aiyy Namysyn shaman women. The eldest son, Chyngys Khan, was appointed master of the destinies of 39 tribes of the Middle World and 27 tribes of the Lower World in the Three-Layer Heaven. The second son, Dzhosogoy Aiyy, settled on the border of the sky and was appointed deity of horses living in the Middle World. Kytai Baksyl settled on the border of the Middle and Lower Worlds, becoming a great blacksmith for the tribes of the three worlds and the ancestor spirit of all blacksmiths. Serken Sesen was ordered to become the all-seeing eye and all-hearing ear of the people of the Middle World. He settled in a hollow tree on the northern headland of the Nudulu Uot Sea. The father chose the Three-Layer Heaven as the place where the tribe of all tribes of the three worlds, Usun Zhurantay, was supposed to live. The spirit master of fire Aan Ukhkhan Ese Kuyon Kogechcher Khatan Tabieriye Byira Byrzha, the spirit mistress of the house of Zhierdile Bakhsyla, the spirit mistress of the barn Nyadzhi Zhangha, and the father all intended to be kind spirit keepers of the well-being of the people living in the Middle World. So all the children of Yuryung Aiyy Toyon become patrons of the *aiyy* tribes. The development of the plot tells about the life arrangement and military campaigns of one of the sons of Yuryung Aar Toyon Tuyone Mongol, about his married life with Kus Hangil, about the birth of their children (a son and a daughter). The plot goes on to include the abduction of their daughter by the *abaasy* bogatyr Suon Suorulun and the military campaign of the son of Tuyone Mongoto free his sister. The *aiyy* man killed four hungry wolves, four bears, poisoned the *abaasy* hero with dead water, and freed his sister. Having defeated all the enemies, the *aiyy* bogatyr and his sister came to their parents. A great feast is arranged by the parents. They began to live happily and cheerfully. The young man’s matchmaking begins with a message to the young Siberian Crane Messenger about his betrothed wife, the youngest of eight sisters (daughters of Surdeh Suge Toyon and Kun Tuyaryma). Kun Tuyaryma settled in the Middle World on the border of the earth and the sky together with her older sister Uoruku-Suoruku – a creature intermediate between *aiyy* and *abaasy* – and with an iron puppy. A non-traditional sister motif is included in the plot: Uoruku-Suoruku fed them, hunting with animals and birds. Once Kun Tuyaryma went fishing, but came back only three months later empty handed. The embittered sister attacked her and began to drink her blood. In the absence of the *abaasy* from the sky, at the behest of Yurung Aiyy Toyon lowered the skin of the Siberian Crane and gave the life-giving divine moisture to Yurung Selyogoy. Tuyaryma turned into a bird. The messengers showed her the way to the country of Toyone Mongol. Arriving to ask for protection from a young man, the girl marries him. The family arranged a wedding celebration that lasted nine days and nine nights. On

the tenth day, the marriage bed was prepared for the newlyweds. In the early morning, a strong wind blew from the west, clouds appeared, similar to the skin of a bear, thunder rumbled, lightning flashed, snow fell and there was hail up to a man's knees. Hotoi Homporun Khara Zhagil came down from above and said... At this point, the text ends.

"Bai Barylakh – Master Spirit of the Black Forest" is a self-recording created by Maria Androsova-Ionova. The text is solid. Published in *Samples of Yakut Folk Literature* (Pekarskiy 1907b), it tells us about Yurung Aiyy Toyon who populated the Middle World with his descendants. He ordered his son Bai Barylakh to live under a large tree in a dense forest, to run four-legged there and breed birds and animals with precious fur. Bai Barylakh descended from the Upper World with the slave Kuralai Bergen, who had a horse named Kuragachchy, and the girl Dzhylyk Dzhylychan Khara. In the mountain gorge, where the four-legged animals were driven, after a storm with strong thunder at the request of the host spirits who descended from the heavens, a stone river was formed. The animals ran along the bank of this river, and the birds flew beside it. The host spirits were delighted that Yurung Aiyy Toyon endowed them with such wealth. Further on in the plot, Yurung Aiyy Toyon appointed the daughter of Khan Aiysyt as the goddess-creator of people's *sur* and *kut* ('soul'). Aiysyt was settled in the east in a country where there were eternal fires to make smoke against mosquitos and where there are three Mongol yurts. Behind the first blessed divine mountain covered with horsehair, Yurung Aiyy Toyon settled the son and daughter of Bosol Toyon so that they would protect all those who were good from evil forces. The second mountain, shimmering with golden light, like outstretched swan wings, was intended for Aiysyt. And another daughter, Mangan Manghalyn, was appointed the spirit mistress of the Middle World and settled in the sacred tree Aar Duuk Mas (Aar Kuduk Mas variant). The spirits of herbs and trees are assigned to accompany her in the form of nine colourful boys and eight brightly coloured girls. Yurung Aiyy Toyon settled his other children, Kun Moltoy and Yurung Molchoy, behind a stone pass separating the Upper World from the Middle World, where three tethering posts and a huge yurt house had already been placed. Living there, they had to give birth and raise many children, breed horses and cattle, warm up the frozen creatures and feed the hungry. The fragment describes the ancient epic motif of how the Upper Deity of the Yurung Aiyy Toyon created the Middle World and its settlement for the *aiyy* people and four-legged beasts and birds, and created the host spirits. Subsequently, these children of Yurung Aiyy Toyon became the ancestors of the Uranghai Sakha tribe. The value of this Olonkho is in this fragmentary recording of Olonkho performer Androsova-Ionova, who showed excellent knowledge of the foundational myths of the Yakut Olonkho, describing in great detail how the world was created in the mythological understanding of the people. There are many mythological images of Yurung Aiyy Toyon, his children Aiysyt, Bai Barylakh, and the sacred tree.

Recorded Fragments in the Russian Language

"The Almighty Olonholoon" is one of the earliest records and the only fixed Olonkho from the Suntarsky ulus of pre-revolutionary times and is thus significant. A summary

of the text of this ancient Olonkho was given by Maack during the Viluy expedition of 1854–1855. He published it as a Yakut language translation in the third part of the book *Viluy District of the Yakut Region*, titled “Olonkho” (Maack 1887: 123–127). According to Maack, a Cossack translator helped him with the translation. The text extracted from this edition, titled “The Yakut Tale Told by a Yakut in the Village of Suntar”, was published by Pekarskiy in 1911. The recording is valuable because it captures the special flavour of the Olonkho language. The plot tells of a hero with a miraculous origin who was born from elderly parents, an ancient and traditional motif.

Bilingual Records (in the Original and in Russian)

“**The Best Strongman**” was recorded by Khudyakov in the Verkhoyansk ulus in the late 1860s. The storyteller is unknown. It is published in Russian in *The Verkhoyansk Collection* (Khudyakov 1890) and in the Yakut language in the *The Samples of the Yakut Folk Literature* (Pekarskiy 1918).

According to the classification provided by Yemel’yanov, the Olonkho is from a group that deals with the ancestors of the tribe, and their sons. The Olonkho contains the ancient epic motif of the miraculous conception of the bogatyr’s wife Bert Khara, who, after the death of her husband pulled up and ate grass from his grave, thus becoming pregnant. The woman gave birth to two sons. She named the elder Beriet Bergen and the younger Zhierbeng Bergen. When the grown-up sons left the house, the woman, having eaten the grass again, became pregnant once more and gave birth to a beautiful girl who grew by leaps and bounds. At the beginning of the plot, the evil *abaasy* Suodalba arrived to woo the beautiful daughter. Having received this news from their mother, the brothers urgently hurried to save their sister from the *abaasy*. In the battle, the brothers kill the evil Suodalba. The motif of the brothers matchmaking, and of saving the elder brother who fell into the jaws of the evil Suodalba, is present. Beriet Bergen marries the eldest daughter of Kuomus Bokunukian and Zhierbeng Bergen marries the youngest. Zhierbeng Bergen, with the help of the chanting produced by the Udagan daughters of the Pleiades constellation, the Moon and the Sun, revives his father using cunning. The deceived Udagan women fly away to their Upper World. Both brothers and their revived father lived happy lives. The motif of the miraculous conception is traditional to all the epic traditions of Yakut storytelling (Central, Viluy, and northern Viluy). There is also the motif of marriage of the *aiyy* character to the Udagan daughters of the Pleiades constellation, in order, with their help, to revive a relative (Khudyakov 1890: 34–50, 51–72).

CONCLUSION

Taking into account the insufficiently studied early Olonkho transcriptions, I have made an attempt to systematise this form according to peculiarities of structural organisation. Recordings are divided into six groups: short records of the Olonkho in the original language published in Russian translation; full records of the Olonkho in Russian; full records of the Olonkho in the original language; recorded fragments in the original

language; recorded fragments in Russian; and bilingual records (in the original and in Russian).

The early Olonkho texts considered in the article are incomplete, the plots are presented in concise form. They are small in volume, for example, the Olonkho "The Yakut Tale Told by the Yakut of the Sredneviluysky Ulus on the Kurga River" is printed on four pages (Maack 1887: 123–127). The closeness of the recorded text to the original is difficult to establish today, the type of presentation depends on who, in what circumstances, for what purpose, and with whose help the recording was made. Some have been recorded by interested Russian researchers who were not fluent in the Yakut language. Some were recorded in translation into Russian with the help of guides who did not know the Yakut language well. Some of them are the self-recordings of semi-literate Olonkho performers in the original language.

However, despite the brief rendition of the plot, the themes, plot and compositional structures, and the content of the heroic Olonkhos, are preserved in them. A special poetic style and fantastic poetics of the Yakut Olonkho can be traced. The figurative composition is not disturbed. All the texts describe the protection by the *aiyy* heroes of their fellow tribesmen from the attacks of the *abaasy* demons, and their heroic match-making.

The plots consist of stable ancient epic motifs (the creation of the Middle World, the appearance of a messenger, a military campaign by the *aiyy* hero to rescue an *aiyy* women abducted by *abaasy* demons, the battles of the *aiyy* and *abaasy* heroes with their miraculous transformations, the revival of the hero, the victory of the *aiyy* hero, the marriage of the *aiyy* hero). Apparently, storytellers brought plots and motifs from previous *olonkhosuts* into the Olonkho repertoire.

In a survey analysis of the figurative system, the different origins of the heroes were revealed: from the miraculous conception of the wife of the hero Bert Hara, their hero sons are born. The lonely hero Er Sogotokh does not know where he comes from or what his origin is. The hero of the Olonkho of the Suntarsky ulus of the pre-revolutionary time was born from elderly parents. All these motifs are often found in the tradition of the Yakut Olonkho. Images of shaman women are not uncommon. Mythological images also appear infrequently.

By virtue of the brief description of the plot, most Olonkho do not contain, or only mention, the motif of the appointment bogatyr as the protector of the *aiyy* tribes, the motif of the bogatyr's naming, the motif of the appointment and the riding of a horse.

There are signs of local epic traditions. In the Olonkho "Bert Khara", recorded in Verkhoyansk, there is the motif of the marriage of the *aiyy* hero to the Udagan daughters of the Pleiades constellation in order to gain their help and revive a relative. This motif is also found in northern Olonkho (see, for example, Tomskaya-Chayka 2011).

In the Olekminsky Olonkho titled "Bogatyr Sordokhai" many motifs from Russian folk tales are outlined, which, undoubtedly, is the influence of the oral poetry of the Russian people, who have lived peacefully in the vicinity for many years.

In the article, in order to identify the continuity of Yakut storytelling traditions, to assess the significance of records from the requirements of today's science, the structural organisations of these traditions are studied, including a survey analysis of themes, plots, stable motifs, figurative systems, local features of Olonkho.

The result of the study supports the following. Firstly, in the early Olonkho texts, despite being incompleteness and concise, the ancient epic traditions of the language, the storyline, canonical motives, and the figurative system of the traditional Olonkho are steadily preserved. Secondly, the stability and variability of ancient plots and motifs, the degree of continuity and other specific features of early Olonkho texts are determined. Thirdly, the scientific value of Olonkho is established, which consists in preserving authentic features, and continuing Yakut storytelling from the period of the 18th century to beginning of the 20th century. Transcriptions of early Olonkho occupy their own niche in Yakut storytelling, and will continue to attract the attention of modern science.

NOTES

1 A small vessel made of smoked mare's skin and intended for the preparation of *kumis* drink.

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