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On the Issue of Origin of the Yakut Epic Olonkho

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Abstract

The issue on the origin of the Yakut heroic epic Olonkho was covered in works in history and ethnography of the Yakuts back in the 19th century, for instance, in the famous monograph *Yakuts. Experience of ethnographic research* by a Polish exile V.L. Seroshevskiy (1896). Since that time, this issue was interesting for many, but no special monograph research has been done yet. Currently, the issue of Olonkho origin is gaining special scientific and general cultural significance, as on November 25, 2005 the Yakut heroic epic Olonkho according to the historical decision of UNESCO was granted the high status “Masterpiece of oral and non-material heritage of humanity”. The Yakut epic is a part of the multicomponent epic creative work of the Turkic nations but it was the only one to get such a high international recognition. This paper aims to revive the scientific interest to the issue of the Yakut epic’s genesis. To date, some rich source-related and historiographical material has been accumulated for broader generalizations – the main point is that the Yakut epic is becoming an important object of comparative historical analysis of the origin of all Turkic epics. The thing is that epic researchers admit that almost a thousand years of existence isolated from the whole Turkic world in the North-East of Asia kept many archaic features of the epics of the ancient ancestors – natives of Central Asia and Southern Siberia. It became clear that Olonkho origin is organically linked with the ethnic history of its nation. The paper follows this comprehensive process reflected in works by archeologists, ethnographers, historians and linguists. Their latest achievements are impressive, bringing a lot of novelty into the conventional views of origins and development of the Yakut epic. The paper attempts to specify that novelty and rationalize the idea that time has come to introduce that novelty into science to solve the long-standing issue of origin of the Yakut heroic epic Olonkho.

Keywords: Olonkho, Turkic epic, Olonkho genesis, Central Asia, Southern Siberia, Transbaikalia, Eastern Turkic Khaganate, linguistic community.

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1. Introduction

Olonkho is the heroic epic of the Yakut nation (self-designation – *sakha*) living now in the Lena river basin in Eastern Siberia in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), a constituent entity of the Russian Federation. The population of Yakuts is about 470 thousand people. On November 25, 2005, the historical reward by UNESCO happened by granting the Yakut epic Olonkho the status “Masterpiece of oral and non-material heritage of humanity”, preventing the threat of losing one of the unique genres of the Yakut traditional folklore, proving a saving act as admitted. It dramatically changed the public and governmental attitude to the national epic, to the problems of keeping it, to the scientific research and use of its potential for public sake. The new stage of intellectual perception of the richest epic heritage of the Yakut nation began (Ivanov, 2011, pp. 13-16).

The scientific interest to Olonkho rose to a new level. Scientific conferences devoted to the national epic and its cultural transformation were held; the tradition to collect Olonkho artifacts and do scientific publications continued; monographs were published on theoretical and applied issues of the epic; records of authentic and amateur performances of Olonkho were going on. In other words, the school of Yakut epic researchers began to form, doing research within theoretical and applied paradigm of Russian and global epic studies reflecting complex and multifaceted history of development of the epic creativity of the Yakut nation.

However, the scientific study of Olonkho sees some blind spots and unsolved issues. They include the most comprehensive issue of Olonkho origin which is core to the understanding of the Olonkho phenomenon. It is generally known that the contemporary Yakuts and their unique material and spiritual culture are a fragment of the ancient Turkic epic world, which once upon a time appeared to be far from its genealogic tree. That somewhat rare historical circumstance has been for a long time provoking those who paid attention to the Yakut epic to raise the issue on the origin of Olonkho. It is quite understandable as isolated existence of the Yakuts from anything Turkic and the epic creativity of the Yakuts which proved its vitality in foreign ethnic and linguistic environment are a unique phenomenon in the global epic space and it is quite clear that it arouses huge researchers' interest.

The facts evidence that the issue of the origin of the Yakut Olonkho was of interest back in the 19th century. It is sufficient to refer to a Polish exile V.L. Seroshevskiy, who visited Yakutsk region in 1880s, the author of a large work about the Yakuts who opined that “it is impossible to make any conclusions on the origin and cognation of Yakut epic songs” (Seroshevskiy, 1993, p. 589), although he in a positive way treated the suggestions by his predecessors that the ancestors of the Yakuts “came from somewhere in the south” to the Lena (Seroshevskiy, 1993, p. 197). Based on the notions by Seroshevskiy, the authors of works on the Yakut epic began using them to explain the origin of Olonkho. However, like the author of the work on the Yakuts, they hardly could specify the exact area where from the ancestors of the Yakuts “came from the south” with their epic creativity.

In 1927, an attempt to answer that question was made by P.A. Oyunsky – a deep expert in the Yakut folklore and epic, the author of the great Olonkho *Nurgun Botur the Swift* (Oyunsky, 2014, p. 399). Based on the epic material, the origins of the Yakut ethnogenesis (including Olonkho as well) were found by him in the Sea of Aral, from where (“from their first native land”) the movement to the East began via Transbaikalia to the Lena basin (Oyunsky, 2013, pp. 32-33). Although that provision did not gain any development in studies by other authors, the merit of P.A. Oyunsky was in the attempt to concretize the issue of the origin of the Yakuts and their epic creative works.

He was followed by an ethnographer G.V. Ksenofontov, who was the first to state in a monograph on the southern origin of the Yakuts (Ksenofontov, 1992, pp. 204-226). Chapter IV of the monograph was devoted to the “oral chronicle” of the Yakuts, i.e., the matter on historical significance of their historical

epic. The author was convinced that Yakut "oral tales" are among "the most important and irreplaceable sources of the historical science" (Ksenofontov, 1992, p. 181). Addressing the Olonkho origin, he wrote: "The core nucleus of the heroic epic of cattle-breeding Yakuts... is interesting to the extent that we find in a disclosed, live and natural view the genealogic tales and myths of the ancient Turkish (Turkic – *author's note*) and Mongolian tribes of Central Asia" (Ksenofontov, 1992, p. 192). G.V. Ksenofontov, thus, points to Central Asia, where the genealogic commonality of the Yakut Olonkho with the epic creativity of Turkic tribes is seen. Moreover, implicitly adopting the provision of A.N. Bernshtam that Yakuts are the ancestors of Xiongnu (Bernshtam, 1935, p. 54), he was the first in Yakut studies to put the hypothesis on the ethnic relationship of the ancient ancestors of the contemporary Yakuts with a nation famous in the global history, and in its development showed the way of the Huns consociation descendants to the wild forests of north-eastern Siberia "from Inner Mongolia via Khalka, Transbaikalia and Cisbaikalia region and to the Lena" (Ksenofontov, 1992, p. 166). The hypothesis by G.V. Ksenofontov seemed deserving the attention of epic researchers but it did not happen, apparently due to the author's repression. Only the historian G.P. Basharin in early 1940s decided to support the idea of the southern origin of Olonkho and assumed it necessary to underline that Olonkho "arose along with the movement of the Yakuts from the south northwards, during the period of struggle for transformation into a nation at the contemporary area of the Yakuts" (Basharin, 1940).

The addressing by researchers to the issue of the southern origin of Olonkho was a new word in the Yakut epic studies, although it remained weakly argued and therefore little convincing. It was supposed to feed it with various sources, especially the materials of comparative study of Olonkho along with the epics of other nations and materials on the ethnic history of the Yakuts. Nevertheless, the issue on the southern origins of the Yakut epic was of great significance; it pushed new studies on a wide range of issues of the ancient history and folklore heritage of Yakuts.

The goal of this paper is to see how the supplementation with facts was feeding the hypothesis on the southern origin of the Yakut heroic epic Olonkho and thereupon to raise the issue on the revival of the scientific interest in the important issue of Olonkho studies based on predecessors' achievements and new theoretical results of the current epic studies.

2. Method

The recent decades saw a definite growth of interest to the theoretical epic studies. This acknowledges that more and more scholars are focusing on theoretical instead of only applied issues of history and development of the epic creativity of nations. Their works quite often discuss the issue of epics origin including the epic creativity of the Turkic nations. The multicomponent Turkic epic was contemplated by such distinguished epic researchers as V.M. Zhirmunskiy (1974), Ye.M. Meletinskiy (1963; 1988), B.N. Putilov (1988), A.P. Okladnikov (1955), I.V. Pukhov (1962; 2004), N.V. Yemelyanov (1980; 1983; 1990; 2000) and others. Recently, a great research by a German academic Karl Reichl was published on the level of the contemporary global epic studies covering on the traditions, forms and poetic structure of the oral Turkic epic (Reichl, 2008). The book is based not only on published and archive texts recorded in the 19th-20th centuries but, which is quite important, on the richest materials of own field studies in Middle Asia and Xinjiang (China). All this enabled that author to professionally analyze the creativity of narrators, variants of tales and epic motives, formulae and style of epics, handing on the torch and variations, as well as many problems of the current epic studies. Reichl's monograph seems to be the beginning of new stage of theoretical research on Turkic epic.

As in the works by above and other authors the issues on the origin and development of the Yakut epic occupy a rather noticeable place and are incorporated in the general theory of epics origin, the topic of

this paper was advised by the basic provisions rationalized by the authors of those studies. Especially attractive is the theory of comparative historical study of epics, developed at the intersection of a few sciences (archeology, ethnography, history, linguistics) and providing in conjunction with typological studies the most reliable results in developing the issue of epics origin. The provisions and conclusions of the scholars covered in this paper were considered and assessed from that standpoint.

3. Creating the Theory of Southern Origin of Olonkho

One of the first to put the question on southern origin of Olonkho in a scientific way was A.P. Okladnikov (later – an academician of the AS of the USSR). He is the author of the first volume of *History of the Yakut ASSR* published in 1955. That volume represents the history of the Yakut nation since Paleolithic till the 17th century when Lena region joined the Russian state. For us, of special interest is the chapter called *Yakut epic (Olonkho) and its links with the south*, containing the analysis of the Yakut heroic epic Olonkho, reflecting the links of Yakut ancestors with the south and its population.

As opined by A.P. Okladnikov, Olonkho is a section of the ancient intellectual culture of the Yakuts which is able to add the last traits to the general view of the cultural level and history of the southern ancestors of the Yakuts before their migration over the Middle Lena. Thinking that “the greatest value of the Yakut epic – Olonkho – is determined by its richness and variety of plots, abundance of bright life details and general artistic merits” (Okladnikov, 1955, p. 257), he noted the value of Olonkho as an important source to understand the history of culture and the national past. In his work, such understanding of Olonkho was expressed from the historical standpoint, i.e., to solve the issues of the origin of the epic and its place in the context of forming the ancient culture of southern ethnic ancestors of the Yakuts, admitting how deep in the past goes the Yakut epic and what is its relation to the epic creativity of southern neighbors of ancestors of Yakuts, too. He opines that “The Yakut Olonkho first was established in the south far from the Middle Lena” and it was created under the conditions of “close cultural and historical and continuous contacts of Yakut ancestors both with their closest kinsmen, ancestors of Altai and Sayans clans and with ancient Mongols” (Okladnikov, 1955, pp. 276-277).

The conclusion of A.P. Okladnikov on the origin of Olonkho, as distinct from preceding scholars, is well argued with the materials of the epic heritage of Yakuts – he used as a historical source almost all the published and translated into Russian Olonkho artifacts. It is this context in which his following provision may be interpreted: “samples of Yakut Olonkho occupy a totally different place in the epic of Turkic and Mongolian nations as monuments in which the characteristics of that archaic period related to the heroic epic of those nations are extant” (Okladnikov, 1955, p. 277).

As it is seen, to solve the issue on southern origin of Olonkho, the main focus was on the materials of that epic as such. This is generally correct. However, A.P. Okladnikov goes further, checking the reliability of his conclusion with the linguistic materials which allowed him to assert that “the Yakut language in its basics formed not in the Middle Lena but somewhere else where Turkic and Mongol clans were living”. What is very important, that fact in conjunction with the other facts, as A.P. Okladnikov wrote, makes it impossible to put the history of Yakut ancestors “in some relation to the history of Turkic clans and peoples of the Middle ages using Orkhon-Yenisei writing system” (Okladnikov, 1955, p. 181). As it is known, Orkhon-Yenisei writing system’s period covers the 7th-8th centuries. A.P. Okladnikov does not link the Yakut ancestors directly with the carriers of that writing system but points to the western Baikal area, where Guligans or Qurykans were living – an ancient Turkic clan using Orkhon-Yenisei writing system; their ancestors, so-called forest peoples in the 8th-11th centuries lived eastwards from the Yenisei Kyrgyzs in the Selenga lowlands, on Baikal banks, in the Angara and possible in the Upper Lena (Okladnikov, 1955, pp. 295-338). It is noticeable that many events of Yakut ancestors’ move to the Lena

are mentioned in historical legends and Olonkho. The latter evidences that the beginnings of the epic creativity are closely linked with the ethnic culture of Yakuts, that they did not get lost in hardest conditions while the nation was moving northwards. This observation by A.P. Okladnikov is one of the most important components of his contributions in the study of Olonkho origin.

In general, the research observations by A.P. Okladnikov on the origin of Yakut heroic epic expressed about 60 years ago are a serious achievement of the scientific epic studies. Its continuing value is that the Yakut epic is studied against the background of the ethnic development of the ancestors of the contemporary Yakuts, the history of linguistic commonality formation in Turkic/Mongol nations of Central Asia and Southern Siberia. He gave particular content to the supposition of his predecessors on southern origin of Olonkho, putting the thought on some links of ancient Yakut ancestors with the carriers of Orkhon-Yenisei writing system. These and other thoughts of the author on Olonkho became an achievement of the Yakut epic studies still remaining of significance. It is generally accepted that the work of A.P. Okladnikov became a “turning point to the study the historical roots and origins of the Yakut Olonkho” (Verkhoyansk Bulletin, 1890). However, there are no strict and well-argued answers to some questions, for instance those relating to historical time and ethnic origins of Yakut epic establishment, i.e., the questions which worry not only epic researchers but also the public. For good reason, back in 1962 a famous epic researcher, an excellent expert in Olonkho I.V. Pukhov opined it possible to say: “The issue of the origin of the Yakut epic and its links with other Turkic and Mongol nations is a task of a special research” (Pukhov, 1962; 2004), stressing that A.P. Okladnikov only “a little unveiled the curtain established in explaining the southern origins of Olonkho” (Pukhov, 2004, p. 5). Yet there is no doubt that A.P. Okladnikov was a pioneer of creation and development of the southern origin theory of Olonkho.

4. Development of the Theory of Southern Origin of Olonkho

Despite the fact that during the time after publishing the book of A.P. Okladnikov epic researchers achieved some progress in the scientific studies of Olonkho and published about three dozen of the Yakut epics, the basic provisions of that book’s author have not been shaken. Moreover, some of them attracted special attention from the standpoint of solving the issues of Olonkho genesis and development, for instance, his provision on closeness of the Yakut language with that of Orkhon-Yenisei writing system peoples of the 7th-8th centuries. So, a famous Yakut folklorist G.U. Ergis began to think that Orkhon Turks back in the 7th century had various folklore creations including beginnings of heroic epic which “were brought by Yakut ancestors from the south” to the Lena basin (Ergis, 1974, pp. 17, 21). Of the same opinion were almost all researchers of the Yakut epic.

Meantime, the above note by I.V. Pukhov happens to be: first, the work of A.P. Okladnikov was written on the scientific level of the mid-20th century, second, to date, a lot of new materials were accumulated to create opportunities for specification and in some cases review of some provisions established in Olonkho studies, including the theory of southern origin of Olonkho.

I.V. Pukhov was one of the first to fill that vacuum. To do so, he applied to comparative study of the heroic epics of Altai and Sayans peoples and the Yakut Olonkho which “makes identification of analogical characteristics of the Yakut Olonkho with epics of Altai and Sayans peoples of paramount interest both in the special (for ethnogenesis of Yakuts and genesis of their epic creativity) and in the general theoretical aspect” (Pukhov, 2004, p. 7). That was a new way to study Olonkho, enabling to watch the compositional analogy of epics, description methods, characteristics and artistic tools similarity, concrete details similarity, similar traditional names of main characters. So, having identified the compositional similarity of the Altai heroic epic Maaday-Kara and the Yakut Olonkho, I.V. Pukhov admitted that “phenomenon is rather unique” (Pukhov, 2004, p. 290). Simultaneously, he identified the similarity of Olonkho with the

epics of almost any Turkic-speaking peoples of the Altai region in compliance with the study scheme specified above. It enabled him to come to a general conclusion that “the ancient commonality of the origins of Olonkho and heroic epics of Altai and Sayans peoples is traced rather clearly”, beginning in “that time, when the ancestors of Yakuts in deep ancient times (*emphasis added by the author*) were directly communicating with the ancestors of Altai and Sayans peoples (Pukhov, 2004, pp. 291-292).

The thought of I.V. Pukhov is of great significance for epic studies: it is formed upon historical comparative analysis of the Yakut Olonkho with epics of other peoples which ensures high reliability. This is what their novelty is. The most interesting is that the author opined on “deep anciencey” of the Yakut Olonkho origins although he refrained from exact dating of those origins assuming that ethnographers and archeologists will specify a more exact time and place of contacts between Yakut ancestors and Altai/Sayans peoples’ ancestors (Pukhov, 1962, p. 293). It is easy to understand. The science then did not have representative enough materials on the issue of origin of Altai and Sayans peoples. Still, the merit of I.V. Pukhov is in proving the possibility of making the time of Olonkho origin more ancient compared to what was stated by A.P. Okladnikov.

It is clear that the statement on “deep anciencey” of Olonkho origins does not *ipso facto* solve the issue on the southern ancestors of the Yakuts. Researchers have a uniform opinion that they are Turkomans living in Altai. But who are Turkomans? In 1967, L.N. Gumilyov, one of famous experts in Turkic history, noting “great significance of ancient Turks in the history of Mankind”, wrote: “but the history of that nation has not been written yet” (Gumilyov, 1967, p. 6). This note is still effective unless the latest studies of particular nations of that vast region are taken into account. But they do not give a generalized view of the history of ancient Turks as there is no answer to the question: “why Turks appeared and disappeared giving their name as a heritage to many a nation...” (Gumilyov, 1967, p. 4).

For us, it is important to understand “why Turks appeared” as it takes us to putting the issue on the historical time of Olonkho origin. L.N. Gumilyov refers to two legends. As per the first one, “Altai Turkstukyu (turkyut) come from western Huns; the second legend “causes the origin of Turks from the local tribe So”, supposedly, from a clan of Kumandy – a north Altai tribe. As per the legend, Ashin kindred clan was ruling them, comprising “five hundred families” and after some events moving in 439 to foothill belt of Mongolian Altai (from Gansu – a northern China’s region). There, they met clans which are considered Turkic-speaking Huns by Gumilyov. The Mongolian-speaking tribe of Ashin was turkized and Chinese called them Tukyū, i.e., Turks or Turkyut.

It is considered that in Northern China “five hundred families” of Ashin comprised various nations but it was in Altai where the union of heterogeneous clans established under the name Turkoman. It appears that the word Tukyū, i.e., Turkomans, was the collective political Chinese-originated name thereafter transformed into the ethnic name of a clan union. L.N. Gumilyov writes that “by the middle of the 6th century both Ashin clan’s members and their companions were fully turkized and kept Mongolian language traits only in titles brought with them” (Gumilyov, 1967, p. 24). As he opines, the nation called “Turks” appeared in the late 5th century, and in the middle of the 6th century a powerful Turkoman ethnic union established asserting itself to the world steadily.

The languages called Turkic now are first mentioned in Chinese chronicles in the late 5th century in connection with the ethnic formation appeared as a result of medley in forest and steppe landscape typical for Altai and its foothills. However, the specialists got to rationalize the provision on deeper anciencey of Turkic language speaking. A contemporary German expert in the Turkoman world Karl Reichl also opines that “the history of Turkic peoples is surely far more ancient than the earliest written artifacts in Turkic” (Reichl, 2008, p. 16) and suggests that there was some other prototype of the Turkic language when the ancestors of Turkomans were among the Huns-Turkic speaking nomad nation fixed in Chinese

chronicles since the beginning of the first millennium BC in Central Asia. In the late 3rd century BC, they created in Central Mongolia and steppe Transbaikalia a strong clan union defeating their main foe clans. Under pressure of continuous fights with neighbors and domestic warfare, the Huns in the late 1st century – 2nd century AD had to leave Central Asia and move westwards. Their area was occupied by numerous clans of cattle breeding nomads Xianbi dominating over defeated and partly remaining Huns.

In recent studies, an interesting thought on ethnic proximity of the ancient ancestors of Yakuts and Huns is making its way. In that context, we got interested in a single fact. The tribe of Kokolets inside the Huns union had authentic culture and, in particular, art, as evidenced by the archeological excavations. Archeologists found in Tuva beautiful vase-like, kettle-like and other clay vessels, often arch- and blade-ornamented, which are missing in the contemporary folk art of Tuvinians but have “the closest analogues in decorating traditional Yakut vessels – *chorons* – acknowledging ancient links of the ancestors of Tuvinians and Yakuts” (History of Tuva, 2001, p. 60). This is a rather intriguing fact reasoning the contemplation of the most ancient origins of the Yakut ethnogenesis and culture meaning an undoubted genetic commonality of Tuvinians and Huns. The case of the archeological artifact relates to the times of Hun-Sarmat epoch in Altai, i.e., to the 3rd century BC.

In the middle of the 6th century, a Turkic state was established in Central Asia – the Turkic Khaganate (552-745). Scholars opine that it was formed by unions of Turkomans separated from Xiongnu. The Khaganate capital was on the Orkhon river and with the lapse of time became an important administrative, political, cultural center of the new state, the name of which relates to the phenomenon of Orkhon-Yenisei writing system of the 7th-8th centuries.

As it is known, in 604 the Khaganate dissipated into Western and Eastern. For us, the latter is of interest as the military and political events occurring there involved into the orbit those who are linked with the ethnic history of Yakuts. So, when in the 7th-8th centuries in the Yenisei headstreams bordering Kyrgyz culture was formed, their neighbors were Qurykans (Guligans), considered direct ancestors of Yakuts; L.N. Gumilyov considered this provision proved (Gumilyov, 1967, p. 265). They were living in Transbaikalia then – in the upstream of the Angara and the Lena, to the Baikal Lake including Olkhon Island. The dissipation of Eastern Turkic Khaganate in 745 found them in that area. Further history of Qurykans was most fully seen by A.P. Okladnikov.

Based on the above note of I.V. Pukhov, we stress that in the work by A.P. Okladnikov pre-Qurykan history of the ancient ancestors of Yakuts is weakly represented. That’s why we tried to focus on that period in a more or less detailed way to find in specialized literature the new data which could be used in search of the ancient sources of the Yakut epics in the context of history of ethnic political unions formed in the 1st millennium BC in the Central Asia and Southern Siberia. As a result, it is found that it was the area where a complex structure zone of ethnic contacts was forming with dominating unions of clans (including Mongolian) later called Turkic. It was also found that despite numerous dynasty wars and ethnic movements in the region, Huns ancestors under various names were keeping their traditions and culture.

In the middle of the 1st millennium AD, the Huns history was continued by a Turkic clan of Qurykans (Guligans) in the northern zone of Lake Baikal who knew the carriers of Orkhon-Yenisei writing system. Staying far from sharp political situations in the center of the region, they strengthened their union’s position as ancestors of Turkic-speaking Huns which Chinese emperors were reckoning with. One of the distinguished national turcologists A.N. Bernshtam back in 1935 wrote: “Yakuts are the ancestors of Huns... Staying in the past far southwards from their current territory is reflected in their myths and legends”, or “direct ancestors of the Hun substrate of those times are the contemporary Yakuts...; the Yakut issue taken in broader terms is a part of the largest issue of the global history – Migration Period” (Bernshtam, 1935, p. 54). Truly, the ethnic history of Yakuts was forming and formed in the whirl of great

events occurring in the Central Asia and Southern Siberia in the 1st millennium BC – 1st millennium AD. Qurykans – the ancestors of Yakuts from the main mass of Turks had to leave for Siberian taiga (Gumilyov, 1967, p. 326).

As it is seen, the theory of southern origin of Yakut ancestors rationalized by A.P. Okladnikov based on the facts of the ethnic history about 60 years ago gained further momentum in connection with a lot of specification. First, the beginning of that history became more ancient; if A.P. Okladnikov linked the ethnic history of Yakut ancestors with the 7th-8th centuries AD, then scholars linked it with the 1st millennium BC. Second, the sources of the ancient ethnic forefather nation of Yakuts, as specified, rooted in the Huns world, while A.P. Okladnikov referred to Orkhon-Yenisei writing system as such.

These adjustments of A.P. Okladnikov's point were acknowledged by the studies on the formation of the Turkic languages. Scholars opine that in the vast area of Southern Siberia also between the Yenisei and the Pacific Ocean, in Mongolia, Manchuria and Northern China in the 2nd-1st millennium BC, proto-Turkic-Mongolian and proto-Tungus-Manchurian language areas were forming. Inside the first, in the middle of the 1st millennium BC, the proto-Turkic and proto-Mongolian languages began to form, while the clans – speakers of proto-Turkic languages consolidated in Northern Manchuria and North-Eastern Mongolia while the clans – speakers of proto-Mongolian languages – in the Central and Inner Mongolia, from Baikal to Ordos (Gumilyov, 1967, p. 400). In the 4th-3rd centuries BC, Huns were first mentioned in chronicles which does not mean that before there was no clan which became Huns. We opine that it is that historical time with which the sources of formation of ancient ancestors of many Turkic clans are linked, including, undoubtedly, a Turkic-speaking clan called later Qurykans, deemed ancestors of the contemporary Yakuts. Having undergone through comprehensive stages of ethnopolitical development among historically famous Orkhon Turkomans, Uighurs and Kyrgyzs, Qurykans settled in the Baikal area but after unknown troubles went northwards (Gumilyov, 1967, p. 326), to the Lena river valley, adapting traditional cattle breeding to new severe natural conditions. So, the pre-Lena ethnogenesis of Yakuts counts some 1.5-2.0 thousand years. The main thing here is that the migrants from the south managed to keep the Turkic language.

Surely, the solution of the issue on initial ancient origins of the Yakut epic seems a rather hard research task, but the achievements of linguists – experts in ancient languages allow feeling the genealogical line which could be deemed the beginning of the ancient stage of the Yakut epics. That beginning is rooted in the world of Huns which, as scholars say, were surely Turkic - speaking. And the fact that the language was not lost by direct Yakut ancestors, was kept and found its *shelter* in the upper Lena basin and spread all over its basin is a unique phenomenon in Yakut ethnic history.

In that connection, we would note a statement by a famous historian of Siberia of the 18th century G.F. Miller: "...characteristic difference of peoples is not in manners and customs, food or crafts, not in religion, as all that may be same in multiethnic nations and different in monoethnic ones. The sole true feature is language: where languages are similar, there is no difference between nations, where languages are different, monoethnicity will not be found" (*emphasis added by the author*). Based on such principal understanding, he opined that the Yakuts have common origin with the Turkic nations and wrote: "they and the Tatars (he meant the Turks by the Tatars – *author's note*) from the ancient times were a single nation" (Miller, 1750, pp. 25-26).

All the history of Turkic linguistics fully acknowledges the conclusion by G.F. Miller. Meantime, it is feasible to note that a Yakut ethnographer G.V. Ksenofontov, solidary with Miller, made an important clarification that "in studying proximity of nations and their ethnic structure of paramount importance is to compare languages by their lexis and grammar structure" (*emphasis added by the author*) (Ksenofontov, 1992, p. 169). That specification above all has a deep warning for those who carry to an

absurdity and tell stories on the place of the Yakut language among the world languages. Surely, the clarification by G.V. Ksenofontov does not relate to the linguists who solve the issue of languages affinity on the basis of deep understanding of the internal nature of lexis and uniform parameters in the grammar structure of languages. This was the way philologists explained genetic affinity of the Yakut language with the Turkic languages and that's why we have no doubt in correctness of their opinion.

The opinion of turcologists on the Yakut language is not fully shared by a German scholar K. Reichl, namely the point that the Yakut language "separated from the general trunk of the Turkic languages in ancient times" and is in *isolated* position from other Turkic languages (Reichl, 2008, p. 26). Due to that isolation, in Olonkho lexicon a lot of archaic elements were found (especially in texts of the Yakut epic artifacts published in the second half of the 19th – early 20th centuries) by I.A. Khudyakov (Verkhoyansk Bulletin, 1890), E.K. Pekarskiy (1907-1911) and others. Those archaic features may shed light on the genesis of Olonkho (Sleptsov, 1991, p. 101).

Back in 1961, a famous archeologist M.P. Gryaznov wrote: "...if not long ago it was deemed that the ancientry of the heroic epic of our country's nations counted a few centuries, in recent years scholars are more and more concluding on its deep ancientry, formation during the military democracy system which, in our areas, corresponds to the early nomad times, namely – the second half of the 1st millennium BC" (Gryaznov, 1961, p. 31). Dating by M.P. Gryaznov was supported by those who were interested in the issue of the Yakut epic origin. A famous turcologist, an author of interesting publications on the ancient Turkomans N.K. Antonov was not only solidary with M.P. Gryaznov, but also made his dating more ancient. He wrote: "The heroic epic of Turkic-speaking nations was born in deep centuries, in the epoch of their living in the Central Asia's steppes in 2nd-1st millennium BC" (Antonov, 1994, p. 95) opining that among those nations there were ancestors of Yakuts as well (Antonov, 1994, p. 38). One of distinguished epic researchers Ye.M. Meletinskiy explained the historical situation of heroic epic creation in those nations; it was under the conditions of nomad cattle breeding life, developed patriarchal relations, wide migrations, wars, quickly formed and dissipated military unions, violent traits of the military democracy epoch. The epic hero therefore quite early gained the characteristics of a warrior knight and his activities – The nature of battle heroics (Meletinskiy, 1963, p. 376). Olonkho plots, main characters and acts, historical events, idealization of the heroic old times, poetics, manner of speech, etc. are well fitted in that definition of the distinguished epic scholar. But the main thing is that the language determines the basic genre criteria of epic (Olonkho), as a genre.

Apparently, everything says that the main nucleus of the Yakut heroic epic – the language – sees common genealogical roots with the epic creativity of the Turkic-speaking tribe of Central Asia and Southern Siberia, and there is no evidence that Olonkho was a result of cultural and other links between peoples. The texts of the Yakut epic's artifacts recorded in the 19th century evidence that oral traditions, handed down from generation to generation, have kept, far from proto-ancestors, the link of the epic time with the original sources, the flair of the ancient southern epic culture. In that is the uniqueness of the Yakut Olonkho. Moreover, it may be suggested that it is in Olonkho where, contrary to the vicissitudes of fate, in the history of carriers/speakers some characteristics and specifics of the ancient Turkic epic creativity have survived.

5. Conclusion

The review of the researchers' views on the origin of the Yakut Olonkho shows the absence of a particular monograph which would contain well-rationalized and conclusive results on that crucial matter of the Yakut epic studies. Currently, we have fragmented views, the scientific value of which needs to be systemized, analyzed and generalized. This work is surely hard to do. We have to deal with the views of

archeologists, historians, ethnographers and linguists, each of them having special tools to prove something not always subject to any attempts to generalizing and getting generally significant conclusions. Meantime, the work done by various specialists on Olonkho genesis should not be underestimated with their contribution to epic studies development, especially Olonkho studies. In general, useful work was done, capable to provoke a monographic study on the level of the contemporary achievements of the global epic studies.

Many researchers are united that the Yakut Olonkho has southern origin and is organically linked with the establishment of epic creativity of the Turkic nations of Central Asia and Southern Siberia, including Xiongnu, well known in the global history. Therefore, it may be suggested that the historical age of Olonkho is about 2-2.5 thousand years. During these centuries, the genre of Olonkho was grinding; the style and language of the epics were polished, epic formulae, speech patterns and other language resources were finalized, etc., i.e., anything which is an artistic richness and aesthetical value of epics.

Following the above thought by a famous expert in the Turkic ancient times A.N. Bernshtam expressed back in 1935, namely that "direct ancestors of Huns substrate of those times are the contemporary Yakuts", that "widely considered, the Yakut issue is a part of the largest issue of the world history – Migration Period", it could be said: the issue of the Yakut Olonkho origin is a part of the global epic studies. No doubt that monographic research of Olonkho will surely acknowledge this thought.

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