

Biomorphic images of comparison in Yakut *Olonkho* and other Turkic epics of Siberia

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Abstract: The present article provides the results of a comparative analysis of biomorphic images of comparison; epic tales of the Turkic peoples served as the material for the analysis. The aim of the given research is to single out the general and special features of comparison implemented in the Yakut, Altai, Khakas and Shor epics. The novelty of this research lies in the fact that being a constituent part of comparison in the Turkic epic texts, biomorphisms have not been studied from the comparative point of view. The importance of the work is based on the necessity to conduct an in-depth comparative study of genealogically related Turkic epics on different poetic levels of the text structure; these findings will make a new contribution regarding the origin and formation of the Yakut *Olonkho*. Special focus is given to the structure of the comparative images embedded in the creative canvas of the analyzed epics. We also overview the special features of the traditional beliefs about animals and birds in the above-mentioned Turkic peoples' culture; these beliefs had an impact on the semantic structure of the comparative images. We also completed a thorough analysis of the comparative structure, which might potentially be "common" for all the cultures overviewed in the analysis. We further make assumptions on the presence of such transformations of the epic texts, as the cultural replacement of the image and a deactualization of the object of comparison.

Keywords: linguistic tool for epic imagery, comparison, biomorphic images, anthroponyms, zoonyms, ornithonyms

INTRODUCTION

The epic heritage as the genuine form of intangible verbal art is the main traditional heritage of the Altai, Khakas, Shor and Yakut peoples (i.e., the Turkic peoples living in Siberia and the Far Eastern part of the Russian Federation). Epic-telling traditions of the peoples, which have

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common long-established genealogical roots and common ancestry, continued to expand through the changing times and locations, social and cultural conditions, and they attained their unique features on different levels. Each kind of epic tale became a unique and wholesome masterpiece that withholds the historical memories of its peoples. The features of the Yakut *Olonkho* are significantly unique as this epic tale genre “detached itself” from the unified Turkic-Mongolic world of art approximately in the middle of the 8th century AD (Ivanov 2013, 54; 2016, 26).

Such aspects as the place that the Yakut *Olonkho* holds and the role that it plays in the system of Turkic-Mongolic epic tales have all been studied previously in the prime of the Russian folklore studies as a branch of the academic science (in the second half of the 19th century) in the research work conducted and written by V.M. Zhirmunsky (1974), E.M. Meletinsky (1978), B.N. Putilov (1972) et al. As for the studies of epic texts in Yakutia, the foundations for holding comparative studies of *Olonkho* and other Turkic epic tales were laid in the 1960-1970s by I.V. Pukhov who was the first scholar to justify the fact that *Olonkho* originated from the southern areas I.V. Pukhov also conducted a number of comparative studies on the plots, images, and expressive means and stylistic devices featured in the epic tales (2004a, 2004b). The key ideas presented in his research studies were quoted in the research conducted by the successive generations of epic studies scholars (Emelyanov 1980; Burtsev 1998; Nikiforov 2010; Ivanov 2013, 2016; et al.); the research ideas established by I.V. Pukhov are further expanded in the modern-day studies held by contemporary experts in *Olonkho* studies and linguistic folklore studies (Gabysheva 2009; Danilova 2008; Koryakina 2017; Borisov 2017; et al.). Some preliminary results of comparative studies have been presented by a range of scholars specializing in other Turkic epic tales – the Altai folklore researchers S.S. Surazakov (1985), T.M. Sadalova (2018); Khakas researchers I.I. Butanaeva & V.Y. Butanaev (2001), V.E. Mainogasheva (2015), N.S. Chistobaeva (2015); the Shor epic tale researchers – N.P. Dyrenkova (1940), D.A. Fyunk (2003); et al. A considerable contribution was made by a Turkic languages and literature expert K. Reichl in his research work *Turkic Oral Epic Poetry: Tradition, Forms, Poetic Structure* (2008); and in an experimental edition by E.N. Kuzmina titled *A Guide to the Typical Locations of the Heroic Epics of the Peoples of Siberia (the Altai, Buryat, Tyva, Khakas, Shor and Yakut people)* (2005), etc.

Despite the existing scientific research findings that were discovered half a century ago, the “theoretical studies on general Turkic epics” need to be updated with new facts and argumentations. Naturally, there is no possibility to determine which of the epics has retained the initial ideas, content and images of the “ancient Turkic” epic text, however, distinguishing the general and unique features of these epics is one of the key aspects of the comparative study as well as to determine their general and culture-specific features. In an attempt to do so, we base our research findings on the theoretical principles established by I.V. Pukhov, who states that “the relatively accurate details regarding the common genetic features of the Altai-Sayan and Yakut peoples epic texts could be retrieved in the following aspects: [...] b) a similar range of descriptive, characterizing and illustrative mechanisms; c) a similarity in specific details” (2004a, 290).

The aim of this article is to single out the general and specific images of comparison in the texts of *Olonkho* and other Turkic epics of Siberia. The topics of our research are the biomorphic images of comparison, i.e., the images of living beings of the world surroundings (humans, animals, birds, fish, insects, etc.) compared to other objects. The research is based on the written examples of epic texts that were published with a parallel text of word-by-word translation into Russian (with the exception of the Yakut *olonkho*). The main texts analyzed in this research are the best examples of the traditional epics in the scope of our study: the Yakut epic *Khaan Dzahgystay (KhDz)* recorded in 1887; the Altai epic *Maaday-Kara (MK)* recorded in 1978; the Khakas epic *Ay-Khuuchin (AKh)* recorded in 1987 and the Shor epic *Altyn Syryk (AS)* recorded in 1967. In order for the results of the research to be more objective, we will also bring examples from epic texts.

RESEARCH METHODS

The predominant methods implemented in the given research were the descriptive method and the method of comparative analysis; these methods allow distinguishing the general and specific features of comparison in the genealogically related epics. In the initial stage of our study, a list of comparative constructions was created using the continuous selection method; this list served as specific research material in the consecutive stages of the study. The images of comparison used in each type of epic text were categorized using the thematic classification method and subdividing them into groups and

subgroups. Quantitative figures displaying how frequently the comparative constructions used as well as the correlation of each group/subgroup in percentages were singled out using the method of static analysis. The special features of specific images of comparison and their functions were singled out by incorporating the methods of a semantic or contextual analysis. In the article the examples from epics are given in the original language with a word-by-word translation of the article's author.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The image of comparison is a component of the comparative structure, the element which is compared with the object. "Using images helps to discover a new mythological world created in the epic" (Lvova 2019, 132). Images of comparison are never chosen spontaneously or approximately; the storyteller and the listeners are normally well-informed of these images and their components reflect real-life aspects in which the people (the representative of a certain cultural epic) live.

Images of comparison used in the epics can be subdivided into six main thematic groups. The quantitative indicators (percentages) of these groups in the epics considered are as follows: *Nature facts*: KhDz (Yakut) – 27%, AKh (Khakas) – 27%, MK (Altai) – 61% and AS (Shor) – 40,5%; *Artefacts*: KhDz – 27%, AKh – 8,5%, MK – 7%, AS – 25,5%; *Biomorphisms and somatisms*: KhDz – 39%, AKh – 47,5%, MK – 21%, AS – 23,5%; *Actions*: KhDz – 4%, AKh – 10%, MK – 1%, AS – 6,5%; *Metals and others materials*: KhDz – 3%, AKh – 5%, MK – 9%, AS – 4%; *Abstract notions*: KhDz – 0, AKh – 2%, MK – 0,6%, AS – 0.

Images can be general (those used in all the epic tales) or individual for a particular epic tale. The general images are universal and particular for all the peoples of the world: celestial bodies, natural phenomena, anthropomorphic somatisms, etc. The individual images are those created in particular geographical locations, climate, domestic and cultural conditions, etc. Along with artefacts, the latter group of images includes a great number of biomorphic images. Biomorphisms, in particular, are subdivided into three main subgroups of anthroponyms, zoonyms, and ornithonyms. In addition to these, there are also fish, amphibians, and insects. Images of comparison that are based on the inhabitants of the animal world can reflect the fauna inhabiting the native land from which the epic originates. Among all

the anthropomorphic images, the most typical ones in the context of the traditional epic are images-ethnonyms and mythological images.

BIOMORPHIC IMAGES OF COMPARISON AND THEIR STRUCTURE

In total, there were 65 biomorphic images revealed in the text of the Yakut epic out of which 23 were anthroponyms, 10 wild and 15 domestic animal images, 15 ornithonyms as well as a frog and mosquitoes. More than a third of the images are not biomorphisms proper, but somatisms. There was a range of universal images-somatism such as the human fist and various internal organs (liver, joints, tendons, abdomen fat) and animal and bird bones (blade, occipital bone, parietal bone, the nose bone and jawbone), which are used to come one object to another in terms of their shape and size.

Anthropomorphic images are used in *Olonkho* quite frequently and conventionally. For instance, a pole with branches that served as a kind of clothes rack for various things and was placed in a bogatyr's homestead is depicted through an association with a young woman, who is holding a crane that has lost its feathers and is trying to fly away. The zoonym images are subdivided into domestic and wild zoonyms. The images of domestic animals reflect the culture of horse-breeding and animal-herding as a traditional form of farming among the Yakut people. Images of horses are widely used in the epic predominantly due to the sacred meaning of a horse in the Yakut culture, which is also common for other Turkic peoples. There is always a large variety of the forest life zoonyms and ornithonyms used in any tales of the *Olonkho* epic. They are images that reflect the areal (local) features of the Yakut *Olonkho*. *Olonkho* tellers use images of those forest inhabitants, birds, fish and insects and the like which are well-known among the listeners. Due to the fact that Yakutia is known for its vast territory, which covers the taiga and tundra, mountains and other landscapes, comparisons of particular *Olonkho* tales can depict the fauna of one particular regional zone of Yakutia. In the context of our research, the *Olonkho Khaan Dzargystay* refers to the epic tradition of the Verkhoyansk region – a northern region of Yakutia. This particular *Olonkho* mentions images of foxes, elks, lynxes, ermines, Siberian cranes, cranes, curlews, scoters, and partridges. Generally, incorporating images of reindeer, sables, hares, squirrels, and various kinds of forest animals and water birds, as well as ravens, eagles, swans, diver birds, and redpolls is typical for Yakut *Olonkho*,

however, these images were not detected in the *Olonkho Khaan Dzargystay*. Particularly popular are the images of water birds of the duck family – the scoter, the northern pintail, the mallard, the garrot, the smew, the Siberian bean goose, etc. It is also worth mentioning that another special feature of the images of comparison in the Yakut *Olonkho* is using the subgroup of ichthionymic images that is not used in other epics. Thus, fish are a popular topic that is thoroughly expanded in the *Olonkho Keter Mulgun*, in which there are images of burbot, herring, minnow, and Siberian white salmon. The text of this *Olonkho* was recorded in the Minsky region, where fishing is an integral part of living. Interestingly, *Olonkho* contains the image of a lion which inhabits the Yakutian forest. Examples indicate that the semantic structure of this image is equivalent to its variations in the other Turkic epics: in a state of anger, the bogatyr growls like a lion.

The analysis of the *Khakas epic* revealed 33 biomorphic images; this number includes 9 somatisms, 5 anthroponyms, 6 wild and 11 domestic animals, 9 ornithonyms, an image of a fly and an ant. In this epic, a third of the biomorphic images is depicted and incorporated in terms of the sounds they make and the voice they possess. For instance, the main female character of the epic cries from grief like a Siberian red deer and like an elk, moans like a spring coucoubird and laughs like a horse, but when it is overcome with anger, it roars like a bear and growls like a lion. Apart from the traditional horse images, this *Khakas epic* also portrays images of a dog; these images are compared to the way a bogatyr cries as if he is howling, or to a bogatyr-girl who is very hungry and eats like a dog, or with two warriors who attack a vicious enemy together. Compared to the Yakut image of a dog, which is used only once to describe an antagonist, the *Khakas epic* uses this image as a semantically neutral one and it is used in descriptions of protagonists. The following are typical images for comparison for this particular epic: a vicious khan, a camel, a mythological Khan-Kiret as well as the blood of cattle.

The analysis of the *Altai epic* revealed that biomorphisms are the second most frequently incorporated image of comparison, while nature facts are the most commonly used images of comparison. There are totally 33 such images of comparison, 6 of which are somatisms: 7 anthroponyms, 5 wild and 9 domestic animals, 9 ornithonyms, as well as snakes, frogs and gnats. The significant differentiating feature of the *Altai epic* in terms of its images of comparison is the implementation of the images of animals and birds based on the association with the

sounds they make to portray the voice, speech and sound features used by various characters. Such images are the roar of a bear, the squeaking of the roe deer calf, the screeching of a young three-year-old horse, the laughter of a colt, the mooing of a cow, the barking of a dog, the yelping of a puppy, the whistling of a mouse-hare, the hooting of an eagle-owl, the rattling of a magpie, and the chirping of a sparrow. The images of comparison typical for the Altai epic are: boars that are compared to the warriors of the Lower World; a stag, a mouse-hare, an eagle-owl, and a sparrow, the voices and the sounds of which are used to give a voice/sound characteristic to the characters in the state of anger, fear, or pain; and the last typical image is the “heart” somatism that is used to describe the yurt dwelling.

The analysis of the *Shor epic* revealed 11 biomorphic images, including 3 somatisms, which accounts for 23.5% of the total number of images: 5 anthroponyms, 4 domestic animals, and 2 ornithonyms. This epic contains a prevailing number of anthropomorphic images. Four out of five anthroponyms are incorporated to give a description of the characters. Particularly interesting are such comparisons as “a bogatyr who is the likes of a true bogatyr”, “they shouted like people shooting out [words]”, all of which are used to express certain types of human qualities by singling out the positive features over the other tribemates. The images of two domestic animals (a goat and a horse) and regular human speech are used to describe bellowing voices during a battle between two opponents and the bogatyr’s speech. The images of a goat and a bat are typically used for comparison in the *Shor epic*.

GENERAL IMAGES OF COMPARISON AND THEIR CULTURAL CORRESPONDENCES

Among the anthropomorphic images of comparison, there is a distinctive group of somatism images of the “big finger”. In the analyzed epic texts, this image is used to express the size of the embryo/fetus/baby: *Khakass*: *Иргек пазындаг пала үчүн / Изиргенерге чарабас* [AKh: 234] ‘Because of a child the size of a big finger / One should not feel despair’; *Shor*: *Эргек пажы шен эр палазы / Чайан пераар...* [AS: 336] ‘A boy the size of a big finger / [You shall] Create...’; *Altai*: *Эргекчеде энтешкен...* [KA: 396] ‘Engaged when we were the size of a big finger...’; *Yakut*: *Дьахтар тараһатын иһигэр / Сутурук саба уол оҕо...* [KhDz: 66] ‘In the woman’s womb / A baby boy the size of a fist...’.

The most distinctive features in the examples given above are the versions of the Khakas and Shor epics on which there is an expressive means of a litotes being used. The example of the Altai epic is selected from another epic text material titled *Kan-Altyn*; in this epic, the embryos inside mothers' wombs are compared to a big finger; these embryos resemble the not-yet-born but already engaged heroes of the epic. In the Altai epic, the image of a big finger is also used to describe the size of a birth mark (MK, 269), a piece of meat (food) (OB, 285), and pieces of flesh, which the rivals tear out of each other during a bloody battle (KA, 351). In the Yakut *Olonkho*, the size of the fetus in a mother's womb is expressed using a different and much larger somatism image – a fist. This might be connected with the fact that the ancient Yakut people did not consider the baby as a person for quite an extensive period even after it was born, due to the fact that the toddler was too vulnerable and could be “taken away” by the evil spirits at any moment. The complexity of such traditional beliefs and their representations in Yakut culture is sometimes explained by “the problem of surviving in extreme climatic conditions” (Sapalova 2010, 75).

Possibly, in the course of time, there was a semantic shift in the understanding of the terms “embryo/fetus/baby” and the image of the big finger became too simple to associate it with this phenomenon and, as a result, it was replaced by a similar one, but a more specific and “reliable” image. The image of the big finger was distinguished only in three *Olonkho* texts in which there are the following objects of comparison: a copper idol on the shaman-girls clothes, which shrunk to the size of a big finger during her chanting (MB, 216); a wall-eye on the eye of the dweller of the Upper World the size of a half of big finger (MB, 368); perhaps, there is a minimal superiority over the opponent (DBr, 233); as well as the anvil of the great blacksmith, which is compared to the appearance of a big finger with crackled skin (KhDz, 177).

The basic features common for all four analyzed texts are the horse images, which are universal in their concept. In the majority of cases, the image of a horse is used for sound imitation: in all four analyzed texts, there is a comparative construction “*to laugh like a horse*”. In addition, the Khakas epic contains the following comparisons: a wolf is compared (in size) to a galloping horse; the cuckoo birds are compared to a horse head and the saddlebacks are compared to a horse's back. In the Altai epic, in order to create two-leveled parallel

comparison constructions, the images of horse are used, which differ in the age – before it rushes forward, the *bogatyr* horse laughs like a year-old stag and screeches like a three-year-old stag. The greatest variety of horse images is seen in the Yakut epic; these images include: a mature stag, a mare, a young stag, the fur growing on a particular part of a horse's body and of a particular color and many other features. The *Olonkho* sometimes contain images of bones or internal organs of a male/female horse of a particular age and color to depict various objects of comparison. For instance, a cross-shaped handle of a tambourine used by a shaman-girl is depicted in the following way: *aghystaakh atyyr sylgy khaangsaaryn unguoghun kurduk* (KhDz, 43) - lit. 'similarly to a nose bone of an eight-year-old stag'. The function of this nose bone image in this comparison is to depict the shape of the cross-shaped handle. If you look at a horse skull from the top view, it can be seen that the nose bone consists of two extended parts linked together with an intranasal seam¹ and in this state it resembles the branches of a cross-shaped handle. The fact that the nose bone belongs to an eight-year-old stag, and not just any ordinary horse, makes the cross-shaped element to look impressive in size. Therefore, additional qualities that the images of comparison possess also play their role in the comparison.

Among the horse images there is a image of a horse head which stands alone in the scope of all the images; this image is presented in all the four analyzed epics. There is a complete similarity that was detected in the Altai, Khakas and Shor epics: *Altai*: *Јети үйелү мөнкү терек бу бажында / Эки түңей ат бажынча алтын күү к ...* [МК: 68] 'At the top of the seven-ringed eternal poplar / Two identical, the size of a horse head, there were golden cuckoo birds...'; *Khakas*: *Пай хазыңның пазында / Ат пазындаг алтын көөк ...* [AKh: 194] 'At the top of the sacred birch-tree / There was a golden cuckoo bird the size of horse head...'; *Shor*: *Қазың паштарында / Ат пажынча / Алтын көөктер қагыш- чөрча* [KS: 118] 'At the top of the birch / The size of a horse head / Cuckoo birds were chirping'.

In the examples from the three epics given above, we can see that the cuckoo bird is especially cherished in the Altai culture (Golikova 2015, 74), Khakas culture (Saaya and Elaev 2019, 221), Shor culture (Chudoyakov and Nazarenko 1998, 441); these golden birds sit at the

¹ Horse skull from the top view; <http://studvet.ru/anatomiya-loshadi-skelet-golovy-cherep/> [accessed February 11, 2020]. (In Russ.).

top of a sacred tree. The foundation for comparing the cuckoo bird to a horse head is the close similarity in shape and in the exaggeration of the size of the compared object. In the Yakut *Olonkho*, such a comparison was not detected; no particular birds are mentioned in the plot description of the world tree. At the same time, the cuckoo bird is also a sacred and totem creature in Yakut culture; however, it is used predominantly as a negative symbol: being “a shaman bird”, the cuckoo bird is depicted as a creature that scares with its magic qualities; there are various beliefs according to which the cuckoo bird brings sorrow and troubles (Kupriyanova 2011, 25). It is quite possible that such frightening representation of a cuckoo bird made it necessary to avoid expanding this image in describing the wonderful and sacred tree; this led to the complete deactualization of this image in this type of place in the epic. The image of a horse head, on the contrary, is a popular image of comparison, with the help of which the size of any object is exaggerated, for instance, a fire-striker (KM, 25), a bogatyr’s fist (DBr, 76-77), and sometimes an abstract notion, such as happiness (KM, 82). In the analyzed *Olonkho* text *Khaan Dzhangystay*, this image is traditionally used to describe the bogatyr’s fire-striker: *Allaakh at bahyn sagha / Ala chokuurdaan khatattakh* (KhDz, 16) - lit. ‘The size of a fast horse head / a colorful and flint fire-striker he possesses’.

The image of a horse in the analyzed epics is relatively the same in its representation; however, among the images, we also carried out a general comparison analysis. It includes comparisons of a stone to a cow, which was found in the Yakut, Khakas and Shor epics: *Khakass: Инек улиндаг хара тастың...* [AKh: 248] ‘To the large stone the size of a cow...’; *Shor: Нек шени тауш...* [AS: 372] ‘A stone the size of a cow...’; *Yakut: Сытар анах саҕа / Хара таас...* [DB: 55] ‘The size of lying cow / A black stone...’.

This comparison was not indicated in the analyzed Altai epic text; in this particular epic text, the image of a horse is used to create sound imitation: “moos like a cow”. In the Yakut epic tradition, this comparison is widely used, the following example from another *Olonkho* text *Duguya Bege* recorded in 1940 in the Oimyakon region of Yakutia serves as an illustration to this feature. Unlike the Khakas and Shor versions in which the object of comparison is a simple stone just mentioned along the way in the course of various actions, the “black stone” in the Yakut epic is almost always equipped with magic properties (Lvova 2020, 208). In addition, the Yakut *Olonkho* depicts

various transformations of this image, for instance, the zoonym image turns into a somatism: Sytar ynakh khannyn *sagha khara taahy* (KM, 96) lit. ‘A black stone the size of a plain tripe of a lying cow’. In this example, the image of a cow is replaced with the image *ynakh khanna* ‘the plain tripe of a cow’, i.e., “a large section of the cow abdomen”. Variations of this set comparison are quite frequently used in all the Yakut *Olonkho* tales.

As for the images of forest animals, the commonly used ones are the images of a bear and a wolf. The image of a bear in the analyzed epics is used to describe the vicious exclamations of the main characters and their rivals; this principle is used in all the analyzed epics except for the Shor epic. Wolves are compared to negative images: in the Altai epic, the bogatyr of the Lower World are compared to wolves; in the Yakut *Olonkho*, tree stubs in the Lower World are compared with the wolves, too.

Birds are one of the most popular images of comparison in epics. In the Altai and Khakas epics, there is a frequent usage of comparison depicting the speed of a galloping bogatyr horse; this comparison is achieved by comparing the horse to a flying bird. Also, among the types of birds, the most frequently incorporated images are those of ravens, cuckoo birds, sea-gulls and swallows. The image of such totem birds as ravens used for comparison to negative characters was detected in the Altai and Yakut epics. The image of a cuckoo bird in the Khakas epic helps to portray the sorrow of the main female character, as for the Yakut *Olonkho* the same image is used to compare it with the ears of the bogatyr horse. It is known that the Altai people believe the cuckoo bird to be “a martyress bird” (according to one legend²) and this brings it close to the semantic image implemented in the Khakas epic. The image of the cuckoo bird mentioned earlier could have possibly become the reason for which this image of “a shaman bird” is not compared to humans in the Yakut *Olonkho*; this way, the human being described in the plot is protected from the possible dangers. However, this does not hold true for the other images presented in *Olonkho*, for example, the image of a horse. The foundation for the comparison of horse ear with a row of cuckoo birds perched together on a branch is the belief in the bird’s ability to predict the future (it is perceived as a psychic bird). Thus, the raven and the

² The Legend about cuckoo bird; <http://myaltai.ru/culture/legendy-zhivotnye> [accessed April 17, 2020]. (In Russ.).

cuckoo bird, being the images of comparison in the analyzed epics, perform a special semantic function and are used for comparison to specific characters. Moreover, birds are often compared in terms of their colors and shades. For instance, the positive characters' hair color is described by contrasting it with the bird colors, i.e., dark or grey hair. Thus, in the Altai epic, the hair of the main character's parents was like "the feather of a raven" when they were young, and when his parents grew old, the hair turned grey as if covered with "a fog". In the Shor epic, there are some instances of comparing the grey hair of the old people with a sea-gull and with the fur hair of a white horse in the Yakut *Olonkho*.

The images of swallows in the Altai and Khakas epics have a common feature, describing a large group of peoples: *Altai*: *Карлагааштый ар албаты / Баатырды мактап айдын турды* [МК: 245] 'Countless, like a flock of swallows, group of peoples / who praised the bogatyr'; *Khakass*: *Халых, аймах чон / Харлыгас чили хайназыбысхан* [AKh: 158] 'Different kinds of peoples / Like the swallows lurked around'.

The image of the swallow is used in the Yakut *Olonkho* for comparison but it performs different functions, i.e., it is used to depict a black and small object or to illustrate a sound imitation, etc. The image was relatively close in terms of its semantics in just one *Olonkho* text, in which swallows are compared to a character that sheds many tears (DB, 69). If we take into account the fact that swallows are considered migrating birds in Yakutia, and a certain type of these birds is even listed in the Book of Endangered Species of the region (Alekseev & Solomonov & Tyaptirgyanov 2003, 122), then we can say for certain that there are not as widely represented in Yakutia as in the southern parts of the Altai region, in Khakasia and Mountain Shoriya (the southern part of the Kemerovskaya region). For these reasons, the absence of the swallow as an image in the description of a group of peoples in *Olonkho* is logically predetermined. Instead of the swallow, this role in Yakut *Olonkho* is played by a different image, i.e. swarms of mosquitoes.

Another point worth mentioning is that there is an interesting image of comparison that is widely used in Yakut *Olonkho* and that has an analogy in the Shor epic text:

Yakut: *Ити кихи ити атын үрдүгэр / Хадьдьаайыттан көппүт / Хара улар курдук / Хатана түстэ* [SuDb: 72] 'This person to his horse / Which sprang up from the spring thawing trail / Similar to a

black capercaillie / Leaned, clinging on tightly’; *Shor*: Алтын чаллыг ак кыр атка / Чарганат шени чапшына түйүтү [AS: 428] ‘To the golden-maned grey-white horse / Similar to a *bat* leaned to’.

These comparisons illustrate how the bogatyr saddles his horse. In this case, the image of comparison is implemented using various ornithonyms – a black capercaillie and a bat, their function, however, along with the object of comparison is a general one. The Yakut comparison brought as an example above is not only a fragment of a four-leveled parallelism structure in which there are additional image of comparison – the female capercaillie, the black grouse, and the snow-bunting. The *Olonkho* also contains a great number of variations of such comparison; however, the main and most likely the initial comparison is that of a capercaillie. Apart from the fact that they belong to the bird species, the capercaillie and the bat are similar in feather color and in the “unexpected manner” of their appearing in the plot.

This gives us reasons to suppose that the comparisons used in the two epics mentioned in the example above are of a common origin, i.e., they are variants of one and the same comparison. Quite possibly, the *Shor* epic managed to retain an earlier version and the comparison used in *Olonkho* is a transformed version in which the initial image was replaced with an image of a bird representing the fauna of the area that served as the new homeland for the Yakut people. To support this hypothesis, it is necessary to single out the different versions of this comparison in other Turkic epic texts as well, which is something we have yet to achieve.

Apart from animals and birds, there are also general features of a snake and a frog that are featured in all the four epic texts. However, the objects of these comparisons are diverse; the only unifying aspect is that these animals are used to give a negative characteristic: in the Altai epic, they are compared to the warriors of the Khan of the Lower World and to a woman-monster (MK, 331, 429); in the Khakas epic, the woman monster has froglike slanted eyes, she wears a belt which resembles a snake; and the woman-monster herself rattles like a snake (A, 480, 492); as for the Yakut *Olonkho*, it is the breasts of the woman-monster are compared to frogs who shed their skin (KhDz, 123); traditionally, a woman-monster and the long tongue of a monster are compared with a snake.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the comparative analysis of the Yakut, Altai, Khakas, and Shor epics, we have discovered that the biomorphic images of comparison are most commonly used in the Khakas and Yakut epics, while the Altai and Shor epics prefer to use image of nature facts. The components of the biomorphic images of comparison in the Altai, Khakas and Yakut epics are variously represented; this can be seen in the variety of images including insects, snakes, frogs, mythical birds, etc. that are not a part of the main subgroups. In addition, the images of horses are widely used in all the three epics.

Each of the epics contains specific images of comparison, which cannot be traced in the epic texts of the peoples belonging to the same genealogical group. In this respect, the Yakut *Olonkho* is marked by a range of images containing types of birds of pheasant, duck, crane, and sandpiper bird families; animals that only inhabit the northern forests, and various kinds of fish presented as a separate subtype of images. The genealogically related Turkic epics have common images of horses, cows, bears, wolves, ravens, cuckoo birds, sea-gulls, swallows, snakes and frogs.

The most valuable result of the research are the 5 examples that were singled out and possibly being variations of the initial comparisons: 1) embryo/fetus/baby compared to the somatism of a “big finger”; 2) the golden cuckoo bird compared to a horse head; 3) a black stone compared with a cow; 4) numerous peoples compared with a flock of swallows; 5) a bogatyr who quickly saddles his horse compared to a bat/capercaillie.

In terms of their identity (frequency) of the singled-out comparison images, the closest correspondences were among the Altai, Khakas and Shor epics. In different Yakut epics, apart from the comparison of a cow to a stone, there are also transformations such as an image replacement and a deactualization of the object of comparison.

Thus, we can conclude that in the course of its development, the Yakut epic has significantly enriched its fictional content, mainly, it contributed fresh and new images from the fauna of its “new homeland” in Yakutia, while doing so, it also went through a number of transformations in the use of comparative constructions, and yet retained some of the previously established elements of comparison.

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