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The Metaphor of Road in Sakha Epic Space

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Abstract. The article outlines the image of the road in the Yakut heroic epic *olonkho*, which describes the life of the Sakha people in different historical eras from various aspects. The road in the epic is a plot-forming spatiotemporal metaphor; it commonly starts in the south and leads north, repeating the pattern of the Sakha migration to Siberia. The article reveals how epic space and roads shaped the collective memory of the people who existed in the south of the Asian continent and had to move to the north. The author examines the typology and functional characteristics of the road and its unique sacred nature, identifies the features of roads and passages leading to the Under World, their out-of-borderness and significant remoteness from the sacred center of the native land. This borderline marginality is aggravated by the personality of the road and its bestial incarnation. Special attention is paid to the rituals related to the road in epic and real space. This study is based on the English translation of the Yakut heroic epic *olonkho* «Nurgun Botur the Swift» written by P.A. Oyunsky.

Keywords: road, path, metaphor, Yakut, Sakha, epic, *olonkho*, characters, rituals.

Research area: culturology.

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Метафора дороги в эпическом пространстве саха

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Аннотация. В статье представлен образ дороги в якутском героическом эпосе Олонхо, который описывает разнообразные аспекты жизни народа саха в определенные исторические эпохи. Дорога в эпосе служит сюжетобразующей пространственно-временной метафорой; обычно она начинается на юге и ведет на север, повторяя схему миграции саха в Сибирь. В статье показано, как эпическое пространство дороги сформировало коллективную память народа о переселении людей. Автор исследует типологию и функциональные характеристики дороги, ее уникальную сакральную природу, выявляет особенности дорог и переходов, ведущих в Нижний мир, их трансграничность, значительную удаленность от священного центра родного края. Эта пограничная маргинальность усугубляется звериной персоналией дороги, которая предстает в образе чудовища. Особое внимание в работе уделено ритуалам, связанным с дорогой, в эпическом и реальном пространстве. В качестве материала исследования выбран английский перевод якутского героического эпоса Олонхо «Нюргун Боотур Стремительный» П. А. Ойунского.

Ключевые слова: дорога, путь, метафора, якуты, саха, эпос, Олонхо, персонажи, ритуалы.

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Introduction

Roads have been a part of people's lives for many thousands of years. If something permeates a person's life that deep, it eventually turns into a universal metaphor for the path of every person's life. «First and foremost, as one of the «timeless» universal images in culture, the concept of the road has caught the researchers' attention with its inner depth. It is archetypal, as its conceptualization is based on the whole set of concepts, images, symbols, and myths associated with the universe of the road. It is noteworthy that world mythology is replete with «road» themes, for example, the adventures of the characters in the works of Homer, Defoe, J. Swift, J. Verne, etc.» (Khomchak, 2015: 264). In many nations' cultures, one can find a common mythological plot, where a protagonist is often portrayed as the most ordinary man, and while being on his journey he faces various trials causing his inner qualities and view of life to miraculously change. His life becomes more conscious. This plot appears in

many myths from various parts of the world, for example, in a series of tales of the Buddha.

In general terms, the road connects multiple points in space and has another important symbolic meaning – a symbol of transformation, overcoming, realization, and liberation. When it comes to the roots of such symbolism, one can paraphrase the well-known saying written over the ogre's palace in the medieval Spanish fairy tale: «If you come in, you will never return» to «If you leave, you will never return ... (or you will never return as the same person)». In most works, the symbol of the road is presented as the path of adventure, the formation of a character as a hero, villain, anti-hero, or as an ordinary man. There can be a lot of outcomes, but the most common of them is the becoming of a hero. While on his way, the protagonist meets different types of characters: wizards, beasts, monsters, and others. Although they may appear only for a couple of moments, in the end, their influence on the hero may be the most crucial.

The Yakut epic *olonkho* contains general concepts of the creation of the world and the universe; people in the Middle World, gods, and the inhabitants of the Under World are objectified in the epic. Depending on the actions of the hero, the epic space expands horizontally and vertically. Thus, the concept of the epic space includes the concepts of «road» and «path». The epic text reflects the natural and geographical realities of ancient times, expressed by certain toponymic groups (rivers, lakes, steppes, forests, mountains, parts of the world, etc.), and also contains information about the imaginary space that is a part of epic fantasy. Historical, cultural, poetic, linguistic, and other aspects of *olonkho* have been examined by many researchers, including V.M. Zhirmunsky, E.M. Meletinsky, I.V. Pukhov, P.A. Oyunsky, N.V. Emelyanov, V.V. Illarionov, and others. Nevertheless, the concept of the road as a part of the Yakut epic world, in particular, is one of the most challenging problems in Yakut folklore studies, and the research is yet to be completed. Analysis of this concept will allow understanding of not only the ideological and artistic content of the epic but also the traditional representation of the Sakha. The Yakut epic helps «to reconstruct patterns of historical movement» according to MacNeill (MacNeill, 2020: 166). Moreover, the research results can be used in investigating the problems of the genesis of the Sakha and «can contribute to historical research on paths and roads» (Falch, 2018: 151). The article, based on the Yakut heroic epic *olonkho* «Nurgun Botur the Swift» by P.A. Oyunsky, proposes a discussion and analysis of the image of the road and its place in the context of the Yakut epic world, including elements of the traditional worldview.

1. Brief notes on the history of the Yakuts (Sakha)

The Yakuts (also known by endonym «Sakha») are the most northern representatives of Turkic-speaking people in North-Eastern Siberia.

«The people called themselves Sakha used to live deep in the South but removed to the Far North-East during the great transmigration of peoples. The childhood of the Sakha passed

under the hot sun but their youth and maturity saw the cruel fight with the ice element of the North. Therefore, the bright and magnificent images of the hot South, kept in their memory, mixed with the dark images of the North.» (Sivtsev-Sorun Omollon, 2011: 12).

The acclaimed Russian-Polish ethnographer and Siberia explorer V. Seroshevsky wrote about the southern origin of the Yakuts in his fundamental work «Якуты» («The Yakuts»), first published in St. Petersburg in 1896. To support this hypothesis, he cites legends and draws lexical parallels between Yakut words and the words of the Mongolian and Buryat languages, as well as the other languages from the far south (Persian, Sart, Uzbek, Kalmyk, etc.). The hypothesis about the southern origin of the Sakha people was put forward by researchers and travelers of the 18th century (F. T. Stralenberg, G. Miller, E. Fischer, J. Lindenau). This was confirmed in the works of other researchers of the 19th century (R. K. Maak, A. F. Middendorf, and others). In the 1930s, Ksenofontov began working on the first monograph of the «ancient history of the Sakha» but left it unfinished. A. P. Okladnikov also studied the origin of the Yakuts; his ideas and contents are reflected in his fundamental work on the ancient history of Yakutia, «Yakut epic (*olonkho*) and its connection to the south» (Gogolev, 1993: 3).

Russian ethnographer Ekaterina Romanova notes: «The migration of nomads from the south to the land of permanent ice and snow marked the beginning of the legendary history of the Yakuts. The complex intertwinings of historical narratives and mythological plots about horsemen compile the main cycle of ancient legends about the Yakut south-to-north migration.» (Романова, 2016: 9–10).

While the ethnogenesis and ethnic history of Siberia are being successfully studied, the history and origin of the Yakuts (Sakha) still require the close attention of researchers.

2. Magical world of the Sakha epic *olonkho*

Olonkho [olon'ho], a Yakut heroic epic that follows the exploits and adventures of mythological characters, first appeared in the eighth to ninth centuries AD. *Olonkho*, the pinnacle of oral and poetic folk art of the Sakha, is

regarded as a heroic epic about the exploits of ancient heroes, ancestors, and defenders of the Sakha people. Olonkho, one of the most ancient epic monuments of the Turkic-Mongolian nations, stands next to the Kyrgyz epic of Manas; Buryat and Mongolian *üliger*s; and Khakass, Shor, Tuvan and Altai epics. «Olonkho is a general term for the entire Yakut heroic epic, which consists of many legends. The number of lines in it usually reaches 10–15 thousand and even more; in larger pieces of olonkho it reaches more than 20 thousand. In the past, Yakut olonkho performers created even larger olonkho works mixing various stories, but these works were never put down in writing» (Pukhov, 2013: 9).

Olonkho takes a leading place in the Yakut folklore. The first researcher and collector of the Yakut oral poetry, Russian scientist and revolutionary Ivan A. Khudyakov called olonkho «the central sort of poetry, the key instrument of education». Olonkho embodied the whole spiritual culture of the Yakut people, expressed their dreams for the future, and synthesized all the best that Yakut oral poetry has reached (Dyachkovskaya, Nakhodkina, 2016: 2399). Olonkho illustrates a magical world that, however, is arranged in a common tribal pattern. Good deities live in the Upper World, headed by the supreme ruler Urung-Aar Toyon. The Under World is inhabited by evil demons called *abaahy* (абаасы) or *ajarais* (аджарай). The Middle World is populated by people – descendants of deities who call themselves *Urankhai Sakha* (уранхай саха), and also by various spirits. *Aar Luuk Mas*, the Tree of Life, connects all these three worlds. Its roots go to the Under World, the trunk and crown grow in the Middle World, and its eight branches reach high into the sky – to the Upper World. The researchers classify three main epic plots: the settlement of the Middle World by a human tribe *Aiyy*; the adventures of an orphan boy *Er Sogotokh* – the Lone Man, the ancestor of the Sakha people; and, the most popular of them, the story about the defense of the Middle World from the attacks of demons – *abaahy* / *ajarais*. In one of the versions, the *abaahy* invade the Middle World, then cut down the sacred tree *Aar-Luuk Mas* with its eight mighty branches,

spreading in the form of the wide green islands in the Upper World, and set it on fire (*Emelyanov*).

The longest (thirty-six thousand lines) and the most popular Yakut epic is «*Nurgun Botur the Swift*», written by the outstanding Yakut statesman, poet, writer, researcher, and founder of the modern Yakut literary language *Platon Alekseevich Oyunsky*. He was the first to convert the oral olonkho into the written form. Due to its cultural and literary significance, «*Nurgun Botur the Swift*» is often called «the northern *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of the Sakha people.» The plot of this heroic epic revolves around the main character, the mighty son of the deities, *Nurgun Botur*, who, along with his beautiful sister *Aitalyn-Kuo* and younger brother *Urung-Uolan*, goes to the *Kyladyky Valley* to protect the people of the Middle World from the constant attacks of the *ajarais*. An *abaahy* demon *Timir Jigistei* kidnaps *Aitalyn-Kuo*. Before saving his sister and committing himself to the graceful warrior *Kys-Nurgun*, *Nurgun Botur* must overcome many challenges and battles.

In 2005, the international organization UNESCO proclaimed Olonkho a masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity. Being a classical example of epic tradition, olonkho demonstrates a close connection with the real Yakut life and the genuineness of the events described make *Oyunsky's* text a reliable historical and ethnographic source of information about the culture and the history of the Sakha people. Along with the cultural information, an important place in the complicated information continuum of olonkho belongs to cultural memory resulting from the mythologization and sacralization of the past of the indigenous Sakha people, being of collective nature and providing the cultural identity of the ethnic group (*Razumovskaya*, 2018: 363). The epic is essential for understanding the history, the culture, and the past of a particular ethnic group. Thus, the historical character of olonkho resides in the general features of culture, mind, history, and geographical environment.

3. Epic space

According to the modern Yakut researcher *L. N. Semyonova* (*Semyonova*, 2000: 8), if we

cut straight to the problem of artistic space, ... then it is necessary to note that the observations of M.M. Bakhtin over the nature of «mastering real time and space in literature» bear great methodological significance. (Bakhtin, 1975: 234). «Chronotope» is not just a formal and substantial category of literature, but also a vital genre-forming feature that often performs «compositional functions». In particular, regarding the narrative-compositional role of «the chronotope of encounter» and «the chronotope of road», M.M. Bakhtin emphasizes: «The encounter is one of the most ancient plot events in the epic (specifically in the novel) <...> The close connection between the encounter motif and the chronotope of the road is eminently essential. <...> In this chronotope, the consistency of spatio-temporal definitions is revealed with exceptional accuracy and clarity as well» (Bakhtin, 1975: 248).

The plot-developing role of spatial relations in the text was also noted by Yu. M. Lotman, who distinguished the concepts of «the road» and «the path». «The road» is a certain type of artistic space, and «the path» is the movement of a literary character in the space. «The path» is the manifestation (complete or incomplete) or non-manifestation of the «road» <...>» (Lotman, 1968: 47). The subordination of spatial descriptions to the plot (based on the ancient Russian literature that has not yet been emancipated from folklore) was mentioned by D. S. Likhachev. In regards to the law of «spatial superconductivity» of a fairy tale, he wrote: «The obstacles that the hero encounters on his way only appear because of the plot, not natural causes. The physical environment of the fairy tale does not seem to know resistance in the first place» (Likhachev, 1979: 336).

The real world cannot exist outside of space and time. Thus, the epic world must also have space-time coordinates. General mythological views are also slightly reflected in the worldview of the Sakha. Being based on both autochthonous and Indo-Iranian ideas, Old Turkic cosmogony was reflected in the concept of three worlds that build up the Sakha universe. In comparison to the ancient Turkic idea of several heavens, the sky in the Yakut epic also has nine layers, and the lowest of which, «khalan»,

is the most dangerous and boisterous. It is inhabited by demons (abaahy) who cause storms, thunder, lightning, and other negative meteorological phenomena ... Its dome-shaped celestial sphere hangs down like a fringe, rubbing the bent edge of the earth. It makes noises similar to furious stallions gnashing their teeth and gnawing at each other. The upper layers present a harmonious image of a blessed, sun-drenched country inhabited by gods and good spirits. «The epic space is described fragmentarily: landscape is represented in outline. Elements of the landscape such as woods, rivers, mountains, seas, and valleys are also not the object of priority description. The wood is a place of epic hero travelling, while a mountain or seashore is a place of battle» (Nakhodkina, 2018: 581).

Epic space expands horizontally and vertically depending on the movement of the hero. In the 19th century, A. N. Veselovsky indicated the specific character of the epic space in the absence of a cosmic perspective (Veselovsky, 1989: 80). S. N. Golubev draws attention to the fact that the spatial proportions system in the epic often becomes broken (Golubev, 1982: 104–105). The space is described fragmentarily: the landscape is presented as an outline. Such landscape elements as forests, rivers, mountains, seas, and valleys are also not subject to priority description. The forest is the place where the epic hero proceeds on his journey; the mountain or the seashore is the place where he enters the battle. The story revolves around the actions of the epic hero, and it seems insignificant that the transition in space is not interrupted by any events.

The epic demonstrates many instances of mentioning certain geographic locations, which may be related to a propensity for credibility. It is considered to be one of the features of epic historicism. (Sabaneeva, 2001: 88). Apart from containing the information about the imaginary space, the epic olonkho reflects the natural and geographical realities expressed by certain toponymic locations.

4. Road in the Yakut epic

The concept of the road is closely related to the epic genre of the Yakut olonkho, with its 10–20 or more thousand lines (Pukhov), long

narrative, plot twists (Emelyanov), introductions at the beginning of each song, uncommon breathing spaces, and intricate ornament of stylistic figures – epithets, similes, metaphors, hyperboles, and word pairs – which is recurrent but always as unique as the landscapes seen along the way. The epic tradition and the image of the road and the path came from the experience that the Sakha had gained in their southern nomadic days. They preserved these impressions in their epic *olonkho* in the northern territories of Siberia. *Olonkho* reflects the stages of the Sakha migration to the north. The tundra, a hostile northern territory, is described as a barren land with fantastic fauna, in contrast to the nostalgic description of the former homeland.

So they left behind Their native land
Of eight rims, They passed the *alaas*,
They passed the bush, They left behind
The blessed sunny world, Following nine bends
on the road, Passed the valley and approached
the tundra. (Oyunsky, 2014: 124, Song 3)

He passed the last meadow, Left behind
the last forest And leaped into the
lifeless lands, Then trotted through the vast
tundra. (Oyunsky, 2014: 162, Song 4)

His blessed valley Shone like a starlet
in the distance... He puffed the fog of the
endless tundra, He got to the Under World.
(Oyunsky, 2014: 272, Song 4)

In folklore narrative, the description of the road, as well as the magical landscape in general, is usually not given in detail. The hero pursues his journey discretely. The movement is integrally viewed as a plot structure principle in the folklore text. «...the specific path assumes numerous functions, e. g. as spatial constituent, as a connector between episodes, and as metonymic reference to the viator himself», states a contemporary researcher in the work «Roads and paths in the Arthurian epic...» (Falch, 2018: 151). Thus, there are indications of the nature, type, or direction of the road that snakes through the epic narrative. A typology of roads in the Yakut epic is diverse, it includes wide white (white is an epithet, most commonly used to emphasize the sacredness of a subject)

sacred roads with nine (a sacred number – AN) bends or curves; passage (*aartyk*) to the Under World; paths laid along impassable thicket, swamps, seashore, and mountains; mud-locked roads, the roads laid on the ground (in the Middle World), underground (in the Under World) and on the clouds (in the Upper World). Epic roads are not common ones, they are enchanted and lead either to the lair of *abaahy* demons or to the sacred places of the gods of fate. The heroes can move both horizontally, traveling in one of the three worlds of the *olonkho* universe, and vertically, moving from the Upper World to the Middle or from the Middle World to the Under, etc. Which type of road the character will come across depends on what challenges are given to him by fate. Thus, the orphan *Er Sogotokh* roams off-road in the snow and in the rain, and the *olonkho* protagonist *Nurgun Botur* mainly travels along wide roads or transports freely between worlds. Besides these functions, the *olonkho* epic roads represent long journeys (*Urung-Uolan*'s search for his bride), short transitions (the *Tungus Arjaman-Jarjaman* and his actions during the day or the protagonist *Nurgun Botur* when he descends in the Under World), intense pursuits (*Nurgun* pursues the kidnapper of his sister), quests (*Er Sogotokh* looking for his parents), aimless wanderings (*Urung-Uolan* and his frantic searches), horse races (the gods race across all three worlds).

The good characters (gods and warriors) much prefer to ride on horseback. Apart from natural types of transportation, they also use clouds as supernatural ones. The main antagonists, demons, move both on the clouds and on fire-breathing, six- or eight-legged, three-headed dragons. Human opponents of the heroes travel on deer and sleds. Less powerful characters, such as the young orphan *Er-Sogotokh*, search for their relatives on foot.

She jumped up to the large white
cloud. Looking like the skin of a mare
Complete with its hooves and mane,
She flew straight up into the high sky,
To the Upper World (Oyunsky, 2014: 30, Song 1)

Filthy face, bandy legs, bloody mouth,
Blackguard, son of *Ajarais* Dropped

down From a passing cloud, Son of a demon
dropped down From a moving cloud
(Oyunsky, 2014: 38, Song 1)

Besides, gods and demons at any time can transform into different creatures, animals, birds, fish, insects, dragons, and natural phenomena such as a tornado, fog, or dew. They can also make themselves disappear.

In the epic, the road starts from the house, from «the place at the door» (Yakut. *сүөл айар*, literally «the mouth of the road») which is on the eastern side, or the entrance itself. It is not by chance that the raven is its symbol. Its mediator qualities characterize the entrance of the house as the border of one's own and another's world (Semyonova, 2000: 35). A special sacrifice ritual precedes the journey:

They slaughtered a brown horse
Where the road begins (Oyunsky, 2014: 33,
Song 1)

Another important ritual is also linked to the road. It is performed during the post-wedding journey of gorgeous Tuiaryma-Kuo. Like Lot's wife, in anguish, she looks back at her father's house and loses half of her wealth, because half of the herd returned to the former owners – her parents.

The sacred roads as divine incarnation are used for ceremonies, rituals, and trials and are mentioned in oaths and blessings:

I have ninety-nine elusive tricks That
will accompany me along The nine bends
of the winding road, And I will trample you
along The road with eight forks (Oyunsky,
2014: 131, Song 3)

My good name, Known on every
road! (Oyunsky, 2014: 299, Song 7)

The road can become salvation and serve as a metaphor for life, as in the story of the orphan Er-Sogotokh:

The newly-born baby Ran rolling
down the road... (Oyunsky, 2014: 340,
Song 8)

And ran swiftly, Naked and barefooted,
Towards the east... (Oyunsky, 2014:
348, Song 8)

Distance traveled used to be measured in various units. Time equals one *күөс* (Yakut. «soup, broth, pottage»), or «how many hours it takes to cook the pottage with meat», which is about 2 hours. Distance is one *көс*, which is equal to the passage of about 10 kilometers in length. «However, the movement itself as a cultural concept does not become the subject of direct narration; the idea of the nature of the movement and its semantics appears in the narration as a result of using specific, moving from text to text formulas. The most common formula is the change of seasons, which shows the duration of the hero's journey» (Semyonova, 2000: 84):

He did not even know How long he
had been running – He recognized spring
By the warm rains, He recognized winter
By the hoarfrost and ice... (Oyunsky, 2014:
349, Song 8)

The road in *olonkho*, which is often depicted as a path or entrance (Yakut. *аартык*) to the Under World, becomes a vital element for the epic plot. In fact, it appears as one of the ominous secondary antagonists adding dreariness to the already hostile background for the main character:

They left behind The blessed sunny
world, Following nine bends on the road,
Passed the valley and approached the tundra,
Through the macabre mouth Through
the gaping gorge Through the crumbling
stomach Of the Great Kuktui Khotun,
Making the heavens thunder Over the soaking
passage, Shooting lightning bolts Down
to the death path With rolling stones And
trembling trees, Through the Uot Chokhurutta
swamp With beetles the size of cattle,
Through the breathing Badilitta bog
(Oyunsky, 2014: 124, Song 3)

With toads the size of a cow, Through
the puffing Tinalitta marsh, Which gave
birth To speckled green lizards With spotty

tails The size of a frozen spruce... (Oyun-sky, 2014: 125, Song 3)

A wide, low passage – Ulakhan Kud-ulu Tugekh Jeleri Where drops of blood Hung everywhere Like nine black, white-headed Clipped ravens, They hung every-where Like the fat, woolly fur Of a bear hanging onto a tall tree; Where the heads of grand toyons Were made into fortune-telling scoops For shamanistic rituals. Where khotuns' Necks and heads Were sacrificed... (Oyunsky, 2014: 347, Song 8)

The road defines the borders of the native land. It is located in the borderlands or even across the border, and its spatial remoteness from the native land (Yakut. аан ийэ дойду) explains why every main road, gorge, passage, or abyss has its own, usually evil, spirit, and why the road acts as a metaphor for obstacles and difficult challenges:

The spirit of a whole, white road With nine bends, The soul of a difficult road With unknown ends, Who has bedding made of icicles, Who has the breath of a free storm, Who has an abundance of intolerable torments! (Oyunsky, 2014: 102–103, Song 2)

Taking into account the dominant role of men and traditional gender roles in patriarchal ancient Yakut society, the affiliation of the spirit of road with the female gender once again emphasizes the marginality of the image of road in olonkho and coming after that «thirty-three misfortunes»:

Muus Kunkui Khotun pass With plenty of misery... (Oyunsky, 2014: 47, Song 2)

«What makes the description of «passage to the Under World» distinctive is that special «animal-physical» code in the narrative initiates the assimilation of this locus to the body of some animal,» states the acclaimed researcher of the Yakut epic space (Semyonova, 2000: 65).

Indeed, the road in the Yakut epic acts as an independent character, and it can be interpreted as a metaphor for a human being. The epic road is like a partially functioning biolog-

ical organism, it has a gender and some other members – mouth, tongue, fangs, pharynx, stomach and digestive tract, heart, eyes, and lungs. It has a personality and retains certain freedom of action: she speaks, thinks, swallows, makes sacrifices, spits blood clots, bleeds and suffers from pain, screams, cries, and gloats. Sometimes, the road also appears as a monster in the form of a huge mouth; it harms travelers and warriors.

...they passed the bittern Of Kokhtai the Great Khotun, Sitting short of breath, Spitting blood clots, And made it squeal, They made it scream, And so they followed The bloody, slippery path As if laid with a bloody gullet, Stretched wide And thrown down From a fallen roaring bull At the age of six, Ready to swallow them; They made their way down Through the narrow crater Into the yawning abyss... They opened The passageway with eight ridges To the dreadful Under World Through its panting Poisonous throat, Through its gaping Crumbling goitre, Through its bloody Macabre mouth... (Oyunsky, 2014: 125, Song 3)

The bloody mouth, The dark shadow, The smoky tail, The sharp bill Uot Kholonoi Khotun! Will you be good to me, If I ask you to, And pay you off? If my feet Are too heavy for you, If your fiery thoughts Are not out, Could you let me pass Through your three ranges? But if you beat me down From the highest point Of the violent sky, Then I will not give you Such generous gifts. Your grubby throat Will not get Fresh blood anymore, Your bloody mouth Will not get Delicious kidney anymore, Your throat Will dry up, Your seven-by-las-long Snaky tongue Will dry up Inside your mouth, Pierce through Your palate Like a spear And poke your eyes out, Your sun will set, Death will knock at your door! He squawked, Like whipping A cast iron cauldron...

Uot Kholonoi Khotun Was deeply impressed With what she had heard. She caught her breath, She could not withstand The heavy feet of the warrior, She cried and yelled, She shouted and shrieked...

The spirit of the road

‘Alatan! Ulatan! Abitai-khalakhai!
 You, the son of The Urankhai Sakha, Have
 the heaviest feet That I have ever known...
 You have burnt My spine and heart with
 poison, You have trampled out The eye of
 my back, My heart is breaking, My lungs
 are burning, My belly is torn, I am go-
 ing to die... Abitai-khalkhai! It hurts so
 much! I cannot take it any more! Anaium-
 tonaiym!’ She cried, Gritting her teeth... ..
 (Oyunsky, 2014: 337, Song 7)

In many cases, the road resembles the demon-abaahy (smoky tail, beak-like nose), a dragon, or a magical serpent not only because of their sinuous form or lack of limbs but also because of their evil nature, more typical of the Under World demons.

5. Road in current Sakha tradition

As a modern researcher states, «folklore motifs... emerged... in various local traditions... provide a connection between conventional archaeological readings of «vernacular» landscapes, and ways in which those landscapes are seen, traversed and exploited in the present day. This includes the contexts of tourism, popular culture and the digital worlds. By making this connection, we gain a richer understanding of those landscapes in both the past and the present.» (Dunn, 2020). To this day, the Sakha people remain cautious of the road. Every time they leave home for a long trip, a ritual is performed. Before leaving, they must make an offering to the spirit of fire (feed it). Thus, the spirit of fire eats oil, fat, pieces of meat or anything good that could be found in the supplies (Efimova, 2013: 26).

During the journey, the road should be fed from time to time in certain places. If a person arrives somewhere they have never been before, they must feed the spirit of this place, and it may not necessarily be the spirit of fire. They can simply put an offering in a secluded place, at the base of the tree, or throw a couple of home-made *olad’i* (small pancakes) into a large river or lake and ask the spirits of the land to look after them. Upon arrival, they should treat

the spirits of fire and road with *olad’i* in order to celebrate their safe return. Nowadays, the custom is strictly observed mostly by hunters and fishermen, since they are fully dependent on the forces of nature, in contrast to domestic ones. A shot of vodka is often poured into the fire, which, however, is a deviation and violation of tradition. This custom of adding strong alcoholic drinks to make the fire brighter also came from the hunters. They were sure that the forces of nature, embodied in Aan Ukhkhan Toyon, the god of fire, and Baai-Baianai Toyon, the god of hunt, approve of their hunting or fishing trip.

In such utilitarian *algys*-blessings, as noted by a modern researcher, the addressers asked for protection from the master spirits of the Middle World: the spirits of fire, home (*balagan*), land, universe, taiga (wild Siberian forest), water, rivers, lakes, roads, and crossroads. (Efimova, 2013: 16). The messages were received by the master spirits of the Middle World, among which the *aartyk itchi*, «the master of the roads», is mentioned. The so-called *shaman trees* (шаман-дерево), that serve in the epic as «the whole network of narrative signposts» (Wood, 2016: 13), which can be found near the roads and federal highways, have become a distinctive interpretation of the old-established custom of worshipping the spirits of the mountains. The shaman tree is usually hastily decorated with scraps of colorful ribbons and ropes instead of traditional *salamah*, a sacred rope woven from black and white horsehair. The travelers and drivers offer coins and food as a gift and ask for blessings during the trip.

6. Conclusion

The article examines the image of the road in the Yakut heroic epic *olonkho*, which describes the life of the Sakha people in different historical eras from various aspects. «The topic of ethnic studies of northern peoples» is considered to be up to date, as N. Koptseva states in her article. She also shares her glimpses of «the peculiarity of the cultural Yakut space» saying «Modern Yakutia experiences the most interesting processes of ethnic and cultural identification associated

with the active participation of various social groups in cultural processes» (Koptseva, 2019: 1130–1131).

Olonkho, which is one of the most ancient epic Turkic-Mongol monuments, stands out along with the Kyrgyz Epic of Manas, Buryat and Mongolian *üligers*, and Khakass, Shor, Tuvan and Altai epics. Olonkho occupies an important place in the spiritual life of the Sakha people. The heroic epic olonkho covers all life spheres of the Sakha people, brings in focus the worldview of the entire ethnos, and preserves information about the understanding of space-time environment, cultural, political, and economic relations, history, traditions, customs, and the way of life in general.

«The key idea of the spatiotemporal concept is that space is the subject of the narrative and everyday human life, mental experience, cultural languages being conditioned to a greater extent by the category of space than the category of time» (Milyugina, et al., 2015: 106). The road in the Yakut epic is a plot-

forming spatiotemporal metaphor. The road in olonkho commonly starts in the south and leads north, repeating the pattern of the Sakha migration to Siberia. The road is the incarnation of life and nature that was conceptually known to the Sakha nomads as harsh, difficult, but surmountable. Paraphrasing Filippello, construction of history through the prism of the road offers new insights into complex understandings of ethnic and social identity, and rethinking of past experience (Filippello, 2017).

The article examines the typology and characteristics of the road and its unique sacred nature, identifies the features of roads and passages leading to the Under World, their out-of-borderness, and significant remoteness from the sacred center of the native land. This borderline marginality is aggravated by the personality of the road – the evil creature – and its bestial incarnation. Special attention is paid to the rituals related to the road in epic and real space.

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