

BOOK REVIEWS

TYPE SCENES IN THE HEROIC EPICS OF SIBERIAN PEOPLES

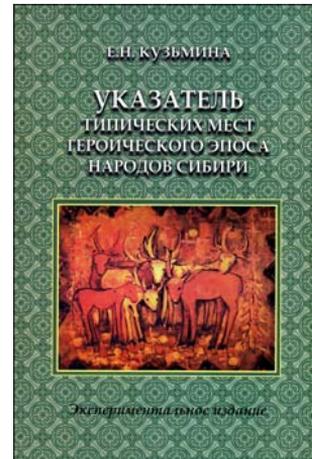
Kuzmina, Evgenia N. 2005. *Ukazatel' tipicheskikh mest geroicheskogo eposa narodov Sibiri (altaitsev, buriat, tuvintsev, khakassov, shortsev, iakutov)*. Eksperimental'noe izdanie / Otv. red. N. A. Alekseev. [Index of Type Scenes in the Heroic Epics of Siberian Peoples (Altai, Buryat, Tuva, Khakass, Shors, Yakut). Experimental edition / Editor-in-chief N. A. Alekseev]. Novosibirsk: Publishing House of Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 1382 pp.¹

The reviewed *Index of Type Scenes in the Heroic Epics of Siberian Peoples* of about 1,400 pages was prepared by philologists from Novosibirsk and published as an experimental edition of 300 copies.

A rather large team of authors (E. N. Kuzmina, N. R. Baizhanova, S. M. Orus-ool, N. S. Chistobaeva, Yu. V. Limorenko, L. N. Arbachakova, T. V. Illarionova, and M. N. Petrova) set an ambitious goal: the systematization of the corpus of type scenes in the epic of Mongolian- and Turkic-speaking Siberian peoples'. According to the project leader Evgenia N. Kuzmina, it should, to some extent, contribute to solving the "problem of plot composition, plot context, and ethno-poetic constancy in the Siberian epics" (p. 4).

Type scenes or common scenes are understood by compilers as "a certain narrative scheme", "intertextual repetitions which move from one story to another". Type scene structure essentially contains "content-bearing or key words [...] linked into stable syntagms (*ustoichivie slovosochetaniia*)", which represent "epic formula". "Type scenes' are closely connected with turns in the plot, as though they mark significance in terms of plot episodes of a heroic narrative" (p. 5). Despite several possible interpretations of the term 'type scenes', suggested in the book, it seems that the analysis of approaches in the studies of epics and problems of terminological system should be considered more thoroughly (see in particular Lord 1994: 83; Reichl 1992: 171–217; and others).

The fact is that it is not only the more or less expanded general/typical passages/scenes that "mark the episodes of the epic narrative important in terms of plot", but also fixed word combinations (minimal in size, just two–three words). It is a formula as such,² peculiar to the mythopoetical mind of storytellers, song writers, shamans, medicine men, wisemen and other groups of people, who are both initiated in and affiliated with the knowledge of the sacral world and who work with the 'word' one way or another. Why have not the authors distinguished such minimal 'type scenes' even though these formulas are occasionally present in the *Index*?³ It appears to me that the answer to this question impacts the most important thing and poses another question:



Is the selected composition approach of this *Index* the most optimal? I will revert to this issue below.

To fulfil the assigned objective, the leader of the authors' team has developed the structure of the *Index of Type Scenes* in advance. In the course of the work, the structure was expanded with new categories, set out to reflect the entire variety of the epic language of Turkic and Mongolian peoples of Siberia. The index structure is based on five major categories reflecting the semantic level of data structuring (The Epic World, Epic Characters, Magic Objects, Compositional Insertions, and Storyteller's Remarks). Some of these categories include small sections which could be divided into even smaller – ranging from 2 up to 22. Furthermore, all material is combined into six large groups according to the ethnic origin of the analyzed epic texts.

Both the goal itself and the presented approach on data processing indeed deserve attention and discussion (see, in particular, a recent positive review of this book, which however contains quite a number of critical comments and valuable suggestions in Novikov 2006: 65–68). To continue the discussion, I will try to focus my attention on several other issues which to my opinion are important for a work with this type of indexes.

Text selection principles. 23 epic texts were selected by the team of authors for demonstrating the systematization principles of type scenes. The majority of these texts have already been published in bilingual academic editions. Three texts were published in the series *Epos Narodov SSSR* ('The Epic of the Peoples of the USSR'), ten texts were published recently in the series *Pamiatniki Folkloru Narodov Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka* ('Folklore Masterpieces of the Peoples of Siberia and the Far East'), four other texts in collections *Shorskii Folklor* ('Shor Folklore') (1 text) and *Folklor Kurumchinskoi Dolini* ('Folklore of Kurumchin Valley') (3 texts). The remaining texts singled out by the compilers have been published by the publishing houses of fiction books (1 Altai and 2 Buryat texts) and also include three unpublished archival texts (Buryat epic stories from the archives of the Institute of Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan Studies, the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences). Presenting a selection of specifically published texts, furthermore texts published recently, which are, so to say, "dissected" and largely secondarily published in this book (supposedly with the approval of copyright owners) does not seem to be the most optimal strategy.

Experts on the epic creation of Siberian peoples are quite familiar with all these texts. It would probably be worth clarifying also the selection principles for the texts that were published differently from the academic publishing principles, but which are included in the present edition along with other academic publications. The only positive exceptions are three archival Buryat epic stories which for the first time were brought to the scholars' attention in full scope. One must say that it is the Buryat section of the book reviewed here which was finally presented in a complete and convincing manner. I suppose, it is mainly due to the unique unpublished materials that drew the attention of the book compilers.

Russian scholarship has accumulated a great number of still unpublished, more or less authentic manuscripts and audio/video records of the heroic epic of the Siberian

peoples, which today is stored in thousands of archival units. That is why the presentation of previously unpublished texts to a large community of researchers is a far more significant mission than reprinting the already published examples.

Texts' presentation principles. I find it important to comment on the editing principles of the *Index*. The problem is that some samples of the epic texts have been published earlier using Latin (Roman) alphabet. In case with the Shor epic story *Khan Mergen*, having an elder sister *Khan Argo* recorded by Nadezhda Dyrenkova, Cyrillic transcription has worsened the reproduction accuracy of the original. In some parts it was probably caused by the intention of the compilers of the Shor section to unify the spelling with the contemporary Shor orthographic system (*kalakpa* instead of *qalaq-pa*). But this principle was not applied to the whole work (vowel length pointed in the original text was mainly omitted, but preserved in the title of the epic story *Kaan Mergen*); in some passages obvious interference in the original text could be observed (for instance, *kamispa* instead of *qamyš-pa*, p. 1118).

Unfortunately, in Russian translations of the texts in the same Shor section no clarification and comments have been made, owing to the obviously low-quality translations of the used publications. For instance, Dyrenkova has poorly translated a phrase “*Kara kul at pagda ba?*” as ‘Black dun horse, if on the string?’ (p. 1172–1173) (instead of ‘If the dark roan horse is on the tether?’). Since it is considered to be important, perhaps it would be worth mentioning in the comments?

No comments are provided on the stylistically and meaningfully different translations of the same type scenes (this, in particular, concerns the Khakass and Shor sections of the *Index*). This reveals that the *Index* is involuntarily targeted at specialists able to read Turkic and Mongolian languages, moreover those who are familiar with the original text. Specialists studying, for instance, the epic of the Samoyed or Tungus-Manchurian people find themselves in a situation where they have only the Russian translation to consult, and thus should irrevocably trust the compilers of the reviewed *Index*.

Index data / structure classification issues. The problem of identification of relatively small but meaningful and regularly recurrent structural units of epic stories which are different from the plot (and maybe from the motif) has a long history in Russian science. Already in the 19th century, Russian missionary Vassilii Verbitskii was the first in Russian Turkic studies to approach this problem professionally and with profound knowledge of the material. His paper *Skazka u altaiskikh inorodtsev* (‘Tale of Altai Natives’, Verbitskii 1882–1883; see also Verbitskii 1893: 139–158), presented the majority of those type scenes. 123 years later, the same method of identification was independently suggested by compilers of the reviewed *Index*. These type scenes include: The Origin of the Epic Hero, Prophecy about the Hero’s Birth, Dangers the Hero Encounters While in Mother’s Womb, The Birth of Most Heroes from Elderly Parents, The Hero’s Height and Childhood Strength, The Hero’s Horses, The Hero’s Armament, Name-giving, The Hero’s Ride, The Hero’s Strength, and The Hero’s Battles. But this period which exceeded a century was full of discussions and multiple

attempts to identify the thematic range and structure of the heroic epic. For instance, a study of the epic of Mongolian ethnic groups, which was conducted in the 1970s–1980s by Nikolai Poppe, Tamara Bordzhanova, Anatolii Kichikov, and Walther Heissig, presents almost the same structural units (see the review in Nekliudov 1984: 86–94). What did the compilers of the present *Index* decide to use and what was renounced? It appears important to specify this in the introduction to the *Index*.

In general, the structure of the *Index* has been thoroughly developed. It takes into account not only the extensive type scenes which are at times important in terms of plot development, but also those which are insignificant or not featured at the first glance. Even though in each similar index, the material is much more extensive than the scientific scheme. The *Index* features a section entitled The Hero's Ride, while some heroes travel on foot, on staffs, on arrows, on magic stones, inside arrows or cow-parsnips, in barrels, or with the help of other epic objects (sometimes bound, or hung on saddle straps of a powerful rival). In this light it seems that would be practical to introduce such sections as The Hero's Walk, The Hero's Flight, etc. Based on Shor materials I can assert that in all similar cases the whole set of stable type scenes and formulas have been clearly tied to the topic of the narrative.

It is absolutely logical that the section Epic Characters includes a subcategory The Hero's Horse. I would suggest supplementing this section with a part The Hero's Bull because many epic characters, including positive heroes, travelled namely on bulls. However, as in the previous case it is possible to follow certain generalization pattern and not split data in smaller categories. Accordingly, in this case it would be possible to identify the sections The Peculiarities of the Heroes' Travel in Space and/or Means/ Ways of Heroes' Travels.

I will now proceed to the more substantial remarks. Incorporating the examples of type scenes into a single rather large group /subgroup and numbering these consecutively is not the strongest structural characteristics of the *Index*. This has led to the situation where the examples of the similar/identical type scenes from different epic texts are very difficult to identify and correlate with each other.

This statement will be clarified by the examples from the Khakass epic. For instance, in part II.A.21. The Feast, a fragment from the epic tale *Ai-Huuchin* ["More than six days / Celebrated and feasted, / More than seven days, / Folk-people enjoyed ..."] is numbered as 2 (II.A.21.2), while a fragment from the epic story *Altin-Arig* ["More than six days [people] / Plied and feasted each other, / More than seven days / Gathered people / On a cheerful marriage-feast / Went on the spree, enjoyed"] is numbered as 13 (II.A.21.13). Type scenes numbered as Khak. II.A.21.12 clearly correlate with similar scenes in Shor epic tales, but to find it out a reader has to browse through all the examples included under the category The Feast, because these type scenes are numbered as 2, 5, and 8. Unfortunately, this "principle" is steadfastly preserved throughout the entire *Index*. Here it is appropriate to refer to the "lost" information, mentioned earlier by Yuri Novikov, which may be missing in a correspondent section/subsection but which can be clearly identified during attentive reading of other sections (e.g., in connection with the elements of the epic hero's clothing and armament, which are provided in various sections of the *Index*; Novikov 2006: 67–68).

Problems with working with the available materials. There are two major problems which solving could impact any further work undertaken by the team of the authors of the *Index*.

First of all, it is important to clearly understand the type of material to be selected for analysis. It appears that the era of working with “ethnic epic traditions” has not passed but, more likely, has not yet begun because despite the apparent abundance of recording of epics, the actual number of such texts is negligibly small. Hereby I mean texts that have been recorded in bulk from one story-teller, from story-tellers of the same “story-telling school”, and finally from story-tellers of the same “area”, which offers, in fact, representative data. As a rule, researchers deal with occasional recordings from different story-tellers made by different people, in different places and times. Sometimes it was a live recording, sometimes a tedious dictation, sometimes the epic story was told to a researcher, sometimes in a large company of kins and relatives, sometimes it was a prosimetrum, sometimes a song. How is it possible to speak about comparative research when specific features of texts created in such situations have not been taken into consideration?

Again, only the Buryat part of the reviewed *Index* follows a completely logical presentation of material, which is divided into Ehkirit-Bulagat, Unga, and Khori texts. As for other “traditions” in which differences including those in type scenes are essential, the compilers have not followed the same principle of data presentation.

The authors could and should have gone further. In regard, for instance, the epics of the Altai, Khakass and Shors the first thing would be to select from at least 300–400 recordings made over time from N. U. Ulagashev, A. G. Kalkin, N. P. Chernoeva, K. Kokpoev and M. Kurtov (Tubalar, Altai-Kizhi and Telengit), from S. P. Kadishev, P. V. Kurbizhekov and A. V. Kurbezhekova (Kizil), from A. I. Abakaev, N. A. Napazakov, M. E. Tokmagasheva, V. E. Tannagashev and S. S. Torbokov (representatives of Mras-Su and Kondoma Shor story-telling areas).

If this was the case, researchers in fact would have (massive) material at hand which would be easier to systematize and, what is more important, would initially provide lucid and completely concrete results which would be important for solving the “problem of plot composition, plot context and ethno-poetical constancy of the Siberian epic”. This would make it possible to discuss the essence of type scenes not in general terms but, rather precisely, on the level of story-tellers and “story-telling schools”. The “level of story-tellers” is the most important one, because it has to do with personal creative work that includes texts recorded from talented improvisers, contaminators, and common transmitters of epics. The aim of compiling a text publication recorded from the same storyteller was not specifically declared in the *Index*. Whether it was intentional or not, but the Khakass part contains two “prepared” epic tales recorded from P. V. Kurbizhekov, and in the Shor part two out of three texts have been recorded from P. I. Kidiakov. If so, this principle could have been applied to other parts.

Secondly, and this is perhaps the most crucial remark, a declared and initiated work which was unlikely to be completed manually and followed by a publication which does not present so much research but the original materials, apologies for quibble, results in an incomprehensible volume. This is particularly confirmed by obvious drawbacks of “manual processing” of the textual material (though I admit that part of the

work was done by computer, using text-processing with WinWord) such as mentioning of type scenes in one text and omitting these in others. For instance, on pages 1062–1063 (Khakass part) there is a type scene from the epic story *Altin-Arig* marked as Khak. II.A.21.12:

A herd of roan stallions was brought in,
All of it was slaughtered and they started the feast.
A herd of chestnut stallions was brought in,
All of it was slaughtered and they started the feast.

An absolutely identical type scene from another analyzed Khakass text *Ai-Khuuchin* (see *Ai-Khuuchin* 1997: 158–159, lines 2162–2165) has been left out of the *Index*. In terms of the mentioned type scene, the classification of the material according to storytellers and not even according to their ethnic affiliation is the most important. The point is that the mentioned type scene (exactly in this form) may characterize the creative art of the Kizil storyteller P. V. Kurbizhekov. At the same time, I have not yet found this particular type scene in the texts recorded from another Kizil storyteller, S. P. Kadishev (they were not used in the present *Index*).

Some TS that are clearly definable in the epic texts analyzed by the compilers have not been included in the *Index*. For instance, there is a common scene of evaluation of the quality of an epic hero and his horse, and it is often used in certain situations by Shor storytellers: “If a horse is born, let it be like... / If *alip* (a hero) is born, let it be like...” This is a fixed formula which appears even in these Shor texts that have been selected for the analysis by the authors, but which has not been included in the *Index* (for instance, in the epic tale *Khan Mergen, Who Had an Elder Sister Khan Argo*, recorded by Dyrenkova: “If a horse is to be created, let the black-grey horse be born and grown! / If a hero is to be created, let his name be Kan Tos Mergen!” (*Shorskii folklor* 1940: 113). However, this leads us back to the question what was decided to be included in the *Index* – type scenes or formulas, or both?

Naturally, some of the ideas and statements expressed in this review are circumstantial and can be optionally considered in the next editions, but I would suggest considering the problem of composing such an index (and the problem of textological analysis of epic texts in general) from a somewhat different perspective. When we speak about the epoch of Vassilii Verbitskii and even about the first third of the 20th century, there were only a few recordings of heroic epics, and when the collectors of epics had an opportunity to record several minutes of live sound on wax rollers at best, then a paper copy of the index of plots, motifs and type scenes would be an absolutely vital and sometimes the only option. However, nowadays when researchers have significant volumes of audio and video recordings available, when there are special computer programs developed for full text databases and for simultaneous processing of various types of quality materials, to set a task of manual text processing and publication of identified type scenes in enormous epitomes does not seem the most efficient use of time, energy, and resources.

With such large volumes of type scenes already included in the *Index* and considered for further analysis, the most efficient way would be to create a single digital database which permits regular addition, and which would be accompanied by an

online analytical device accessible for users via the Internet and capable of answering the research requests in line with the assigned task. This would solve several problems including the categorizing of any type of type scene regardless of its role in plot composition or its volume, a nearly instant selection of any type scene necessary to a researcher from the whole database regardless the initial classification, a search not only by “fixed word combinations” or extended type scene, but also by key (or any other) word, and many other problems. Adding not only texts but also audio- and video-recorded data to this database would enormously expand the future community of users, which would no longer include only experts of epics and textologists, but also ethnologists, psychologists, ethologists, and researchers representing other schools and tendencies.

Without any doubt the job done by the *Index* compilers is worth appreciation and should be certainly continued. I suppose that a digitization of this monumental edition along with changing the approach during selection of material from published samples of “national epic traditions” to the level of epic story-tellers and story-telling schools, considering the types of performers and recording situation, with a special focus on previously unpublished recordings and interactive presentation of the material, would take the initiated research to a whole new level.

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Notes

¹ The *Index* is available online at <http://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/kuzmina28.htm>

² Cf., for instance, “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea” by Milman Parry (1930: 80). See also a review of interpretation approaches of the term ‘formula’ and the analysis of various formula groups, distinguished on their functional basis, in a remarkable book on North-Ostyak epic versification by Anna Widmer (2000).

³ E.g., “Where the horse stood – a footstep remained, / Where he rushed away – no trace is left” (p. 211), “Best of the best the hero ate / Best of the best he drank” (p. 981), “Like soft leather they crumple / Like pelt they twist” (p. 1173).

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THREE VOLUMES ABOUT SOCIAL POLICY

Romanov, Pavel & Iarskaia-Smirnova, Elena (eds.) 2007. *Sovetskaia sotsial'naiia politika 1920-kh–1930-kh godov: ideologiia i povsednevnost'*. [Soviet Social Policy in the 1920s–1930s: Ideology and Everyday Life.] Moscow: Variant, Centre for Social Policy and Gender Studies, 432pp.

Romanov, Pavel & Iarskaia-Smirnova, Elena (eds.) 2008. *Sovetskaia sotsial'naiia politika: stseny i deistvuiushchie litsa, 1940–1985*. [Soviet Social Policy in 1940–1985: Scenes and Actors.] Moscow: Variant, Centre for Social Policy and Gender Studies, 376pp.

Romanov, Pavel & Iarskaia-Smirnova, Elena (eds.) 2008. *Sotsial'naiia politika v sovremennoi Rossii: reformy i povsednevnost'*. [Social Policy in Contemporary Russia: Reforms and Everyday Life.] Moscow: Variant, Centre for Social Policy and Gender Studies, 456pp.

At the beginning of this century, the Faculty of Social Systems Management was established at the Saratov State Technical University (SSTU) in Russia. This department was founded by uniting the departments of social work and social anthropology. SSTU