

The World of the Khanty Epic Hero-Princes

In his final book, the late A. T. Hatto analyses the Khanty epic tradition in Siberia on the basis of eighteen texts of Khanty oral heroic epic poems recorded and edited by a succession of Hungarian and Russian scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The book examines the world-view of an indigenous culture as reconstructed from its own words, demonstrates a flexible outline for organizing an analytical dossier of the genre of oral heroic epic poetry in a specific culture and presents an abundance of new information to compare with better-known heroic epics. Consisting of main sections on the cosmos, time, the seasons, geography, spirits, personae, warfare, armour and weapons and men's handiwork, the book also includes a section of background information on the Khanty people. There is an afterword by Daniel Prior. Marianne Bakró-Nagy contributed specialist knowledge of the Khanty language to the linguistic interpretation of the texts.

ARTHUR T. HATTO, FBA (1910–2010) was a scholar of medieval German literature and, especially after his retirement from the University of London, where he served as Professor of German from 1953 to 1977, the comparative study of oral heroic epic poetry. He was elected an Honorary Fellow of the School of Oriental and African Studies, of which he had served as a Governor, and a Corresponding Member of the Finno-Ugrian Society. His other publications include translations from Middle High German poems for Penguin Classics: *Tristan* (1960), the *Nibelungenlied* (1965), and *Parzival* (1980); the edition and translation *The Memorial Feast for Kōkötöy-Khan (Kōkötöydün Aşı): A Kirghiz Epic Poem* (1977); general editorship of *Traditions of Heroic and Epic Poetry* (1980–1989), the two-volume proceedings of the London Seminar on Epic, which Hatto chaired from 1964 to 1972; *Essays on Medieval German and Other Poetry* (1980); and *The Mohave Heroic Epic of Inyo-Kutavère* (1999).

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*The World of the Khanty
Epic Hero-Princes*
An Exploration of a Siberian Oral Tradition

ARTHUR HATTO

Based on Eighteen Khanty Heroic Epic Poems



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To
the Memory
of the
Heroic Lineage
of
Hungarian Recorders
Editors and Translators

Antal Reguly (1819–1858)
József Pápay (1873–1931)
Miklós Zsirai (1892–1955)
Dávid Fokos (1884–1977)
István Erdélyi (1924–1976)

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----------------|
| <i>List of Illustrations</i> | <i>page</i> ix |
| <i>Preface and Acknowledgements</i> | xi |
| 1 Background: The Khanty | 1 |
| Territory and Population | 1 |
| History | 5 |
| Traditional Way of Life | 10 |
| Beliefs | 12 |
| Language | 15 |
| Verbal Art Genres | 17 |
| 2 The Eighteen Khanty Heroic Epics, Their Collectors and Publishers | 21 |
| 3 Introduction | 27 |
| 4 The Cosmos | 38 |
| The Netherworld | 38 |
| The Middle World | 44 |
| The Upper World | 45 |
| 5 Time | 48 |
| 6 The Seasons | 54 |
| 7 Geography | 59 |
| ‘The Lowlands’ or Northern Lands | 60 |
| The ‘Southland’ | 61 |
| The West | 61 |
| The East | 63 |
| Itineraries | 63 |
| 8 Spirits | 67 |
| The Sacred Corner and the Ancestor-Spirits | 67 |
| Other Places of Conjunction: Sacrifice – Animal, Human, Other | 68 |
| | vii |

viii *Table of Contents*

| | | |
|----|---|-----|
| | The Idol-Hut | 73 |
| | The <i>Lonχ</i> | 78 |
| | The <i>Meηk</i> | 82 |
| | The <i>Otsi</i> | 86 |
| | The <i>Jeli</i> | 87 |
| | Grey-Winged Elders | 89 |
| | Horses | 92 |
| | Intervention from beyond the Grave? | 96 |
| | Souls, Shades and Shapes | 98 |
| | Culture-Heroes | 101 |
| | Sacred Trees | 102 |
| | Shamanism | 105 |
| 9 | Personae | 110 |
| | Social Ranking | 110 |
| | Ego among His Brothers | 118 |
| | Ego and His Fosters | 134 |
| | The Bride | 136 |
| | The Bride as a Person | 151 |
| | The Antagonists | 156 |
| | The Rus | 162 |
| | The Samoyed | 168 |
| 10 | Warfare | 172 |
| | Tären | 172 |
| | Scalping and Beheading | 178 |
| | The Blood-Feud | 181 |
| | Wooring-Expeditions | 185 |
| 11 | Armour and Weapons | 194 |
| | The Corselet | 194 |
| | Bows and Arrows | 200 |
| | Headgear | 208 |
| | Swords | 212 |
| 12 | Men's Handiwork | 215 |
| | Woodwork | 215 |
| | Ships and Boats | 219 |
| | Ironwork | 225 |
| 13 | Afterword: Arthur Hatto, Ethnopoetics, and Epic Moments | 227 |
| | <i>By Daniel Prior</i> | |
| | <i>Bibliography</i> | 233 |
| | <i>Index</i> | 239 |

ILLUSTRATIONS

Cover and Frontispiece: Heavily armed warrior, sixteenth to early seventeenth century AD (Drawing © Aleksei Zykov, from A. P. Zykov et al., *Ugorskoe nasledie: Drevnosti Zapadnoi Sibiri iz sobranii Ural'skogo universiteta/Ugrian Heritage: West-Siberian Antiquities from the Collection of Urals University*, Yekaterinburg: Ural State University, 1994, fig. 18)

| | |
|--|--------|
| 1.1 Current political map of Western Siberia | page 3 |
| 1.2 Map of Western Siberia and the Khanty homeland | 4 |
| 1.3 Settlement, late sixth to seventh century AD (Drawing © Aleksei Zykov, from A. P. Zykov et al., <i>Ugrian Heritage</i> , fig. 19) | 6 |
| 1.4 Heavily armed warrior, first century BC (Drawing © Aleksei Zykov, from A. P. Zykov et al., <i>Ugrian Heritage</i> , fig. 13) | 7 |
| 1.5 Reconstruction of the burial costume of an Ugrian princess, first half of the fourteenth century AD (Drawing © Aleksei Zykov, from A. P. Zykov et al., <i>Ugrian Heritage</i> , fig. 20) | 8 |
| 1.6 A Khanty family group: the Kurlomkins in the mid-1990s (Photograph © Andrew Wiget, reprinted from Andrew Wiget and Olga Balalaeva, <i>Khanty, People of the Taiga: Surviving the Twentieth Century</i> , Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2010, fig. 48) | 13 |
| 1.7 Diagram of historical relationships within the Uralic language family | 16 |
| 2.1 Facsimile of Reguly's manuscript of the first page of 'Song of the War-god of Mun'kes' (From reproduction in Miklós Zsirai, <i>Osztyák Hőse'nekek</i> , Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1944, vol. I, of facsimile in Antal Reguly and József Pápay, <i>Osztyák népköltési gyűjtemény</i> = Zichy Jenő Gróf, <i>Harmadik Ázsiai utazása</i> , V. Kötet. Budapest and Leipzig, 1905; copy in the late author's collection) | 23 |
| | ix |

| | | |
|-----|--|----|
| x | <i>List of Illustrations</i> | |
| 8.1 | Group of eastern Khanty visiting shrine in 2004 (Photograph and caption © Peter Jordan, reprinted from P. Jordan, <i>Technology as Human Social Tradition: Cultural Transmission among Hunter-Gatherers</i> , Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015, fig. 3.10) | 75 |

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

‘The eighteen Khanty¹ Heroic Epics which form the basis of the present investigation were recorded in the mid- and late nineteenth century in pen or pencil by ear in sessions with willing bards and not in the live presence of patron, bard and cultic audience. Scholars versed in such poetic song regard Khanty heroic songs as of a rare high quality.’

In his original preface to this volume in 2005 my father confessed that he was not versed in even one of the many Khanty dialects, and further that he was unmoved by it. He wrote: ‘My belief that important aspects of Heroic Epic Poetry can be profitably studied in good translation was clinched recently by a letter from a stranger who approved of my handling of the Mohave Heroic Epic of Inyo-Kutavêre in a book of that title published in 1999.² My work was based on A. L. Kroeber’s English edition of the Epic (1951) and supported by Kroeber’s Field Record, also in English (1902). Had the Mohave original been available Kroeber would have edited it and published it, leaving scholars of my ilk to ponder whether we would or would not acquire a competence in Epic Mohave. But alas! – the Mohave original was wafted away on the dry breezes of Arizona as it fell from the lips of Inyo-Kutavêre while bilingual Jack Jones Englished it for Kroeber’s stylus. The Writer-out-of-the-blue, now an esteemed Friend, proved to be a distinguished Professor of Southwest American Anthropology, too modest to be named here. I thank him again for having unwittingly confirmed my belief that it is permissible to investigate some aspects of Heroic Epic Poetry in good translation, a belief based on seventy years, on and off, of the study of Heroic Epic Traditions, for the most part in the original.

¹ In his lifetime Arthur Hatto wrote of the Khanty people and their epics using the term ‘Ostyak’; it was the word employed by other scholars of his generation. More recent scholars use ‘Khanty’, the name the people call themselves. This, as well as the now widespread perception of ‘Ostyak’ as a derogatory term, has led the editors to substitute ‘Khanty’ for ‘Ostyak’ in the present work. For consistency with current usage they have also substituted ‘Mansi’ and ‘Komi’ for ‘Vogul’ and ‘Zyrian’.

² A. T. Hatto, *The Mohave Heroic Epic of Inyo-kutavêre* (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1999).

xii *Preface and Acknowledgements*

‘The virtually complete Mohave Epic of Inyo-Kutavêre is supported within its genre by no more than a few fragments. By contrast, any one of the Khanty Epics studied here is supported by seventeen others, not to mention the closely related Mansi Lays. Confrontations of the many variants in the thesaurus of formulae, topoi and themes, can only deepen our understanding of the Singers’ intentions.’

My father had earlier recognized that ‘the Khanty tradition of heroic epic is at once the most arresting in the whole of Siberia and one of the most problematic as regards textualization’³ and later acknowledged that ‘the path to their full appreciation was marred by deficiencies.

‘All of the textual editions except probably for the last (István Erdélyi’s) had to rely on a knowledge of Khanty that was still in the making. The texts were in Khanty with Hungarian and German translations. Of the two languages of translation Hungarian, as a co-member of the Ugrian group of languages, was very well suited for translations from Khanty, an advantage which extended to metrics and, often, to poetics. As to the other language of translation, German, its efficacy was the reverse, sometimes with wretched effect. Of course German was the second language of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The English translations in this book are thus at a double remove from the Khanty original.

‘With the field left wide open it seemed reasonable that a scholar (ATH) who had studied heroic Epic on and off for some sixty/seventy years should use his German to make a coordinated study of the eighteen Khanty Heroic Epic editions which he had meticulously collected over the years. As he studied this theme, on and on, his eyesight no longer served to hunt up the latest publications of the Khanty lexicographers for cruxes affecting the translations. The book hung in abeyance for some time until a perspicacious publisher put him in touch with a highly experienced linguist, Professor Marianne Bakró-Nagy of the Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, whose forte is Khanty.’

Professor Bakró-Nagy checked every construction in my father’s ‘German-English rendering against the latest Khanty lexicography and commented on every Khanty crux in his original typescript. Mounting knowledge of Khanty revealed more and more the semantic and even poetic misconceptions in the German and even Hungarian translations.’ In 2007 a meeting followed and my father decided to accept Marianne’s kind offer of help to rescue the book.

My father very much welcomed Professor Bakró-Nagy’s specialist contribution to the linguistic and philological interpretation of the transcriptions, and her proposal to provide background and illustrative material on the Khanty people. The fruits of Professor Bakró-Nagy’s invaluable work

³ A. T. Hatto, ‘Textology and epic texts from Siberia and beyond’, in L. Honko (ed.), *Textualization of Oral Epics* (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2000), p. 149.

Preface and Acknowledgements xiii

are incorporated in the text of the book and in additional footnotes. However, in accordance with her wishes her contributions are not attributed. I also record my grateful thanks here.

In his original acknowledgements my father wrote, ‘My heartfelt thanks for generous assistance in the making of this book are due to the following: to Mrs Sheila Mackay for the gift, in Xerox, of S. K. Patkanov’s Two Volumes on the Khanty and their Folk-poetry; to Professor Michael Branch, C.M.G., former Director of the School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies in the University of London, for crucial borrowing concessions from the School’s Library, as administered by a succession of sympathetic Librarians whom I also thank here; to Dr Daniel Prior of Ohio State University, Columbus, U.S., for hunting down elusive dates of Hungarian Khanty specialists, and for his part in a continuing dialogue on the dynamics of Oral Heroic Epic Poetry; to Dr Thomas Eggers of the Biologische Bundesanstalt, Braunschweig, for vital information on Eurasian ‘swamp-trees’; to Mrs Wendy Brierley, who deftly transferred the Manuscript in my aged hand to disc; to my Son-in-law, Dr Peter Lutman of Rothamsted Research, Harpenden, for his critical revision of what I had to say on the habitat and diet of Berserkers and those who ran amok: and, last but far from least, to my Daughter Jane, who lifted the logistical burden in the making of this book from my shoulders to her own, failing which it could never have seen the light of day.’

That daughter now adds her own heartfelt thanks to two colleagues of her father in the field of epic, Dr John D. Smith, Emeritus Reader in Sanskrit, Cambridge University, U.K., and Dr Daniel Prior, Associate Professor of History, Miami University, U.S., for their painstaking and devoted editorial support over several years, which has brought this book through to publication; also to Dr Jarkko Niemi of the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Tampere, Finland, for kindly answering queries on Khanty song traditions; to Dr Stephan Dudeck of the University of Lapland Arctic Centre, who so generously reviewed the text of the background chapter (Chapter 1) on the Khanty and offered numerous insights and suggestions (Dr Dudeck also allowed us to incorporate his thoughtful words on Khanty oral traditions in the text, pages 18, 20); to Dr György Kara, Professor of Central Eurasian Studies at Indiana University, U.S., for providing István Erdélyi’s dates and for translating the Hungarian caption to the facsimile of Reguly’s manuscript; to Dr Aleksei P. Zykov, Senior Researcher at the Institute of History and Archeology of the Ural Division of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Yekaterinburg, for permission to republish some of his drawings of Iron Age archaeological reconstructions that appeared in his book;⁴ to Dr Andrew Wiget, Professor

⁴ A. P. Zykov et al., *Ugorskoe nasledie [Ugrian Heritage]: Drevnosti Zapadnoi Sibiri iz sobranii Ural'skogo universiteta* (Yekaterinburg: Ural State University, 1994).

xiv *Preface and Acknowledgements*

Emeritus of English, New Mexico, U.S., for supplying the photograph he took of the Kurlomkin family and previously published in his book,⁵ and for permission to publish it again; to Professor Peter Jordan, Director of the Arctic Centre, University of Groningen, for supplying the photograph he took of a group of Khanty visiting a shrine and previously published in his book⁶ with its caption and for permission to publish them again.

Where our diligent efforts have been unequal to the task of aligning my father's original text with the insightful contributions and guidance of others, John Smith, Dan Prior and I accept responsibility for the resulting shortcomings.

I leave the final words to my father: 'Through the lighter losses in Hungarian and the heavier renderings through German and English, nevertheless, a magnificent World of the Khanty Epic Hero-Princes emerges with not a shred to compare with the hopelessly *post-oral Iliad* – no Aristotelian heroic epic from the bard's tongue but a huge epopee that would gladden the heart of a prisoner in his cell as well as a don in his den.'

Jane Lutman

⁵ Andrew Wiget and Olga Balalaeva, *Khanty, People of the Taiga: Surviving the Twentieth Century* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2010).

⁶ P. Jordan, *Technology as Human Social Tradition: Cultural Transmission among Hunter-Gatherers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

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