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The Social Status of the Yakut Epic Hero

Abstract

The Yakut heroic epos, known as *olonxo*, allow us to derive a general picture of the epic hero's social status. The hero's status is generally based upon divine descent, personal strength and leadership, and recognition by fellow tribesmen. The hero, as ruler, assumes such fundamental roles as master of the herds and as head, judge, and protector of the people (roles that are integral to the concept of supreme power found in any chieftdom or early state). The Yakut epics also depict a society in which property was no longer held by the clan in general but by the family. For this reason the characters of the *olonxo* often transfer leadership to their children, even when the children do not necessarily possess their parents' heroic qualities. This reflects the beginnings of the acquisition of power through the right of succession. Thus the *olonxo* portray a society that finds itself on the eve of the appearance of more complex structures, such as exist in chieftdoms and early states.

Key words: *olonxo* — hero — divine descent — succession

ORAL narrative was one method utilized by the northern Eurasian peoples — who possessed no writing systems of their own — to transmit historical and cultural knowledge from one generation to the next. Narrative also comprised a convenient means of inculcating traditional values through the use of virtuous characters as role models (TREPAVLOV 1990a, 124–25). Thus the heroic epos of the Turkish and Mongolian peoples form a valuable source for the study of social relations in the medieval and (to a lesser extent) the modern nomadic world. Comparing Turkish and Mongolian oral epics with written sources also provides a means of reconstructing, to some degree, the ways in which the late tribal societies and chiefdoms of central Asia and southern Siberia were governed and led.

The present article analyzes the extensive Yakut epic source known as the *olonxo*. The events depicted in the Yakut heroic epos have their origins deep in the tribal system (NESTEROVA 1985, 413), but by the time the *olonxo* appeared many aspects of this system had already changed. Primitive equality was a thing of the past — society was stratified, and chiefs ruled over the rest of the people.

Generally speaking, the greater part of the narrators' attention in the *olonxo* is directed towards one particular hero. Typologically speaking, the heroes of the *olonxo* correspond to the protagonists of the Turco-Mongolian oral epics (the *batırs* and *khans*) and to actual nomadic sovereigns (the *qaghans*, *khans*, and *bägs*). Hence the epic hero is always the leader of the society in which he lives. The fact of leadership is all that counts — it is immaterial whether the society he rules is a small group of ten families or a vast khanate.

Let us now turn to the *olonxo* themselves in order to examine the heroes' status, the sources of their power, and their prerogatives. Generally speaking, there are two principal sources of the hero's authority: divine descent and physical prowess. Of these divine descent is more important, so let us consider this first.

DIVINE DESCENT

In chiefdoms and early states it is usual for the supreme authority to claim divine descent. Generally, though, these claims are expressed in the form of long, verbose formal titles or obscure assertions of divine benefaction. The claims of the heroes in the *olonxo* are different in that many such claims are quite literal descriptions of the genealogy of the leader, who is often a personification of a divine being (primarily of Yürüng Ayii Toyon, the supreme deity). Sometimes the hero is elected from amongst the gods to become the future earthly ruler-forefather of the Yakuts (as in the epic *Nürgun Bootur the Impetuous*). His birth into the world may be through a divine mother's womb, or through a form of divine intervention in which celestial messengers deliver a magic liquid known as *ilgä* to an old man and old woman, who then give birth to the hero (YEMELYANOV 1980, 149, 200).

Regardless of how the hero comes into the world, his fate is predetermined by the celestial world-keepers. This preordained fate of his is made known to him in various ways. The hero may be informed of his earthly tasks prior to his birth (OYUNSKY 1975, 22), or words may appear on a pillar sacred to Odun Biis, the god of fate (OYUNSKY 1975, 60, 346). More common is the variant in which the gate of the sky swings open and supernatural envoys emerge to instruct the hero how to overcome the diverse troubles that he will have to face (POPOV 1936, 46–47, 55–56, 86, 93–94).

The contact between the hero and his sacred patrons is extensively described in, for example, the *olonxo* known as *Tamallayi Bergen*. One day when the hero asks his mother for some words of advice, she sends him to a sacred hill where his fate is foretold. Through the mediation of three sky-dwellers (*ayii*) and nine magical horsemen he receives from Yürüng Ayii Toyon a magical horse and the name Tamallay Bergen, while twelve shaman women hand him vessels of *ilgä* to provide him with heroic powers (YEMELYANOV 1980, 192). Yürüng Ayii Toyon, who has consulted the Books of Fate, must also convince the hero to stop a senseless duel with a certain adversary, since it is written in the books that both the hero and his opponent are destined for immortality (YEMELYANOV 1980, 199).

Providing the hero with a name and a horse are among the indispensable elements that determine his fate. Other, more basic, determining elements are the hero's sex and, strange as it may seem, his species (it makes all the difference that he is born as a human and not as an animal). The allocation of such factors is explained in the *olonxo* entitled *Baai Barüilaakh*, where Yürüng Ayii Toyon names his daughter the goddess-

distributor of *sür* and *qut*, the sacred substances of living beings: “For making boys’ *sür* and *qut* he gave her an arrow with a feather, for making that of girls’ he gave her a pair of scissors, and for making that of cattle he gave her a ball of wool” (YEMELYANOV 1980, 21).

In this way the boy comes into the world, reaches manhood, and receives a horse and a wife (the latter also being considered an essential step on the journey of life) (OYUNSKY 1975, 22; YEMELYANOV 1980, 215). A place of residence is also prepared for him in the Middle World (the Earth, the world of people); here the hero finally settles in accordance with divine command (POPOV 1936, 90, 93). In contrast to southern Siberian epics, in which the hero rules from the very day of his birth without any textual explanation for his sovereign power, the Yakut *olonxo* provide each hero with a definite territory, which, pending his appearance, cannot be controlled by anybody else. His future earthly subjects already dwell there, repelling their enemies’ forays (OYUNSKY 1975, 51, 52).

The life course of the hero who comes to them is predetermined, so that his happiness depends on how faithfully and punctually he carries out this course. The principal goals of the divinely born Yakut epic ancestors are the production of descendants in the Middle World, the teaching of cattle-breeding and other cultural skills, and the governing and defense of their subjects (KHUDYAKOV 1890, 135; OYUNSKY 1975, 22, 59; YEMELYANOV 1980, 47). As the all-powerful Yürüng Ayïï Toyon admonishes the hero Yürüng Uolan in the *olonxo* of the same name, “Propagate in the middle place [the Middle World]; increase the two-legged; breed cattle; let not your fire die out; let your children be with homes and your mares and cows with fences and pastures” (GOROKHOV 1884, 48).¹ It is thus clear that the success of the hero’s predetermined earthly tasks as well as the prosperity and safety of his descendants derive from Heaven and its various manifestations, led by Yürüng Ayïï Toyon.

But upon what does the hero’s personal safety depend? Are the exorcistic spells of the chief-*ayïï* — spells such as “Inviolable happiness is promised,” “Your destiny is indissoluble,” “Your name will ring out” (OYUNSKY 1975, 55, 60) — enough to guarantee his safety? They are not; the hero must find a direct protector against the dangers of sickness and injury. The above-mentioned Yürüng Uolan solicits the Mistress-Spirit of the Earth and the Tree² for a benediction, and receives the following reply: “May fire never consume you nor water ever take you; may stone never hit you nor sharp blade ever cut you. May you defeat all enemies and adversaries” (GOROKHOV 1884, 46). Hence there is something in addition to Heaven that helps the hero realize his supernatural potential-

ties: the Earth, personified as the Mistress-Spirit of the Earth and the Tree. From the Earth issue a warrior's daring, speed, and physical power, and to it he appeals for strength; the Earth, in turn, behaves toward him like a nurturing mother (as with, for example, the hero *Är-Sogotokh* [YEMEL'YANOV 1980, 111]). This dual role played by the Earth is reflected in the frequently met appellation "mother-patroness."

The Earth appears in many *olonxo*, always in the capacity of the hero's trustworthy defender and omniscient benefactress. Following N. A. ALEXEEV, I believe that it is possible to interpret this representation of the Earth as the collective image of the sacred native land (1980, 9–11), analogous to the ancient Turkish "Earth-and-Water" (*järsub*) that acts jointly with Heaven.

In this way the hero grows healthy, strong, and confident: he descends to earth and ultimately arrives in the land allotted to him. If this land is populous and ready to accept a sovereign, then the newcomer simply takes his place at the head of the people and assumes his predetermined duties. If the land is deserted, aid is not long in coming: cattle "from an orifice in the sky" fill his pastures (the same happens if the cattle are lost [MAAK 1887, 127; PRIKLONSKY 1891, 172]). The hero is not simply a cowherd, however. He is also destined to rule over the population, so he must turn to the urgent task of organizing his subjects under some kind of system.

To what extent do the divine forces participate in this aspect of the hero's duties? We have already mentioned the case of *Nürgun Bootur*, who was elected to become the future earthly ruler-forefather of the Yakuts while still among the demiurges. In this *olonxo* the Middle World was already populated with "the three tribes of *Urankhai-Sakha* and the four clans of *ayii-aymagha*,"³ each group with its own chief but with no overall leader (OYUNSKY 1975, 52). This suggests that the tribal structure antecedes the hero's appearance and thus the beginnings of the Yakut epos themselves. The gods are aware of this tribal order but nevertheless dissatisfied with it, as it leaves the clans and tribes incapable of sustained resistance against invasion; the hero is thus sent to bring them a new social system. Discussion of this point will have to be deferred to a later study; here I wish to demonstrate the hero's connections with Heaven. As a further example let us examine the *olonxo* known as *Erebil Bergen*.

In this *olonxo* the hero's wife-to-be is Shaman-woman, who has eighty-eight warrior-*abaasi* (vicious ghosts) as dowry-slaves and forty-four warrior-*ayii* as escorts (YEMEL'YANOV 1980, 215–16). All appear in accordance with divine command, but it is important to note that Heaven is completely unconcerned with creating kinship ties between the

characters — indeed, the members of Shaman-woman's suite are related neither to her nor to each other, and they belong to different worlds, the Upper (*ayii*) and the Lower (*abaasi*). In this way Heaven explicitly rejects the primitive authority system. The hero, the servant of the divine, acts as leader in the new system depicted in the *olonxo*.

The demiurges do not leave their creature to the mercy of fate after sending him to the Middle World. Although, as we have seen, the hero's strength is increased by the Earth, Heaven too plays a part, intervening at crucial moments. For example, when the hero is threatened by death in battle, the enemy may be struck down by lightning, Yürüng Ayii Toyon's spear (KHUDYAKOV 1890, 215; PRIKLONSKY 1891, 173). This close connection between the hero and the forces that rule the world distinguish him from other mortals; nevertheless, the *olonxo* also emphasize the ruler's autonomy.⁴

The general applicability of my point regarding the hero's divine status may be demonstrated by the words of a ghost who appears in a dream to one of the supporting characters in the tale *Omolloon*: "Propagator of the Yakut people, he came in glory, delicate, glorified in song, and vigilant, fathered by Ayiisit (the god of fertility), predestined by Iyehsit-mother (the goddess of people and cattle), and preordained by Earth and Heaven" (POPOV 1936, 165). One can see here a personal testimony in the form of an enumeration of qualities that points both to the hero's supernatural origin and kinship and to his central function in the Middle World.

The wording of this quote, incidentally, bears a strong resemblance to that of the titles of certain ancient Eastern potentates: in the eighth and ninth centuries the throne designations of Hsiung-nu, Turkish, and Uighur sovereigns contained approximately the same components, albeit in a slightly different sequence (TREPAVLOV 1990b, 10). Although the epithets in the *Omolloon* tale are not intended as a title, the high status they point to presupposes a certain ritual or symbolic distinction. The hero Khan Jargystai is addressed with a similar combination of appellations by the dwellers of the *ulus* to which he is sent: "God's visible son, master of nine *uluses*, father of eight *uluses*, primordial king of the nation" (KHUDYAKOV 1890, 145). These too can be likened to a title, in that they apply to the physical person of the hero in question. Certain other *olonxo* heroes, such as Karak Khan Toyon, possess true titles: Karak Khan Toyon, having made posthumous arrangements for his *ulus*, declares to his people that "he appoints after himself his son-in-law Sordokhai in the capacity of Karak Khan" (OVCHINNIKOV 1904, 8); "Karak Khan" in this context is not a name but a proper title.

In this way the hero holds the power he has received from Heaven through a formula that is also an embryonic title. The hero's title and name not only distinguish their bearer from his fellows but also mark his social status. Such social marking is clearly discernible in the case of the hero Yüngkeebil. Yüngkeebil had "an elder brother who was not a hero but who fished in the capacity of a commoner The old man's wealth was limited to four reindeer" (XENOFONTOV 1937, 508). The older brother is thus the less wealthy of the two (four reindeer is a quite modest number), and is a fisherman precisely because he is a commoner — it is, according to some texts at least, unworthy of the tribal and military elite to be occupied with anything besides war and the hunt. The entire life of the epic hero is devoted to wandering and fighting; inactivity is tedious to him (OYUNSKY 1975, 97). A youth who lives passively in the home camp excites the criticism of his kinsmen (OYUNSKY 1975, 99), who graze cattle, catch fish, and follow their heroes and *toyons* (tribal chiefs).

Thus we see that the hero (warrior) is of the highest social status in the *olonxo*. *Toyons* also play a role in the epics, but the main character remains nonetheless the hero-warrior.⁵ As should be evident by now, the hero is presented not merely as a mighty fighter but as someone in a category above that of the common man.

PHYSICAL PROWESS

Divine origin and protection alone are not sufficient to legitimate the hero's leadership — every clan, after all, possessed its warrior-athletes, and secular (i.e., non-shamanic) pretenders to celestial aid could be found everywhere. It was thus necessary to look for another, purely "earthly" basis of authority. Thus the brothers Yüngkeebil and Yüren, after slaying the great chief Chempere, do not refer to their ties with Heaven and Earth when addressing the fallen leader's subjects. They ask the people whether they will submit voluntarily, and receive the answer, "We will submit to you, for there is no one among us who could resist you. We had a sovereign, and now you may take his place" (XENOFONTOV 1937, 517). One can surmise here that the decisive reason for their submission is not the divine origin of the conquerors but their physical strength. Their victory in battle proves that their claim to leadership is better grounded than that of the slain Chempere.

The hero Khaptagai Batır is also forced to face a hostile tribe. The tribe eventually asks him to become its sovereign,⁶ but he must confirm this decision by racing the local running champions. Only after defeating them can Khaptagai Batır fulfill his new role, since only then does the tribe come to fear him (KHUDYAKOV 1890, 61).

Such victories are not final, however — strength, speed, and coordination all wane with the passing of time. The situation is even harder for the hero's successors, who must reaffirm their power over the tribes subjugated by the hero by constantly proving their fighting abilities. Hence Khaptagai Batır's son has to be even more ferocious than his father, asserting his lordship through his ruthlessness in killing both Yakuts and Lamuts (Evenks) (KHUDYAKOV 1890, 61). We will return to the problem of status inheritance below.

An interesting sidelight relating to this question of physical prowess concerns the "eternal lords" mentioned in some *olonxo*, such as *Nürgun Bootur*. A council of heavenly tribes is described, in which

the elders of three great clans [of primordial sky-dwellers] began to choose leaders, formidable and incorruptible judges for the tribes both above and below. Odun Biis, Cangis Khaan, and Dylga Toyon, being equal to Fortune in power, were chosen as the eternal lords of the Three Worlds" (OYUNSKY 1975, 12).

To become such a "lord," it is suggested, one must be "formidable," just as an epic hero must. Such formidability is enhanced by the clerk-assistants that each of the three divine judges retains, "monstrous giants" whose principal merit consists not in their clerical abilities but in their possession of huge fists with which to frighten unrepentant wrongdoers (OYUNSKY 1975, 12).

Thus we see that the principal factors involved in an epic hero's acquisition of social leadership are celestial parentage and patronage, and personal heroic qualities. The order of these factors as given corresponds not only with their frequency of mention in the *olonxo*, but with their accepted order of importance in a general model of authority legitimation.

Regardless of how the hero rises to sovereignty — whether through selection by Yürüng Ayii Toyon, through circumstance, or through success in war — he stands out from the rest of his earthly kinsmen and subjects (here we might recall the hero Yüngkeebil and his elder brother, a common fisherman with only four reindeer). In the eyes of the people, the hero has legitimate cause to possess authority greater than that of ordinary men and to engage in out-of-the-ordinary conduct. The subjects of the hero Yüren-Khosuun, for instance, "considered him their leader and obeyed all his orders" (XENOFONTOV 1937, 498). But what does leadership here imply? What are the characteristics of a hero, and what are his social functions?

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HERO

To begin with, a hero, regardless of whether he simply lives with his family or is the leader of a number of subjects, is usually portrayed as the owner of numerous herds. This becomes apparent through the description of his first task every morning: inspecting the "countless multitude" of his cattle and guarding them against thieves (KHUDYAKOV 1890, 143; MAAK 1887, 123; OVCHINNIKOV 1904, 1; PRIKLONSKY 1891, 139). The hero is thus assumed to control many pastures as well, though these are not directly mentioned in the *olonxo*.

The hero is the leader and defender of his clan or community, a role he undertakes out of a personal sense of duty and in accordance with the demiurges' will. We recall the Yakuts, who, prior to Nürgun Bootur's arrival in the Middle World, had to defend themselves from their enemies' incursions; it is precisely to protect these original Yakuts that Nürgun is created, awakened, and dispatched to the Middle World by the gods. The leader is also the military head of the community, leading the tribe's fighting men against their neighbors in those rare cases when this is preferred to single combat (KHUDYAKOV 1890, 48). Whether or not the hero's military functions are limited to defense of the clan (ERGIS 1974, 187, 197) can be determined only by examining the administrative structure of epic society as portrayed in the *olonxo*.

The hero is also looked upon by his people as both an intercessor and a provider of welfare. In numerous *olonxo* the heroes share their wealth and booty with the people. Following PUKHOV, one may regard this as "the survival of the general custom of distributing booty among the clan" (1975, 413). In the *olonxo* known as *Müldü Bögö*, the forefathers are said to undertake this redistribution following a burst of self-reflection, in which they realize the blameworthiness of their life-style (they "have never worked, everything has been made for them by others; their wealth was accumulated through raids on their neighbors" [PUKHOV 1962, 225]). This, however, may have been a later interpretation on the part of the narrators of what was merely a formality: only a "quarter of the unrighteously made fortune" is actually allotted for distribution and the remaining three-quarters is disposed of in other ways (PUKHOV 1962, 225, 242). When the distribution is undertaken by the hero, who is the traditional model of perfection, the share is much more generous, but it must be kept in mind that he reserves a much greater part for himself personally, as is the due of the recognized leader of the people.

The disposition of justice appears to be another prerogative of the hero. Indirect evidence from the *olonxo* as well as analogous situations in the heroic epics of the Turkic peoples of southern Siberia suggest that

the hero possesses plenary powers to judge his people. Properly speaking, this is the logical outcome of the sacred origin of his authority and of his duties as his people's protector. In tribal societies, chiefdoms, and, at times, early states, life was in the main regulated by customary law and the chiefs' and elders' orders, whose authority in turn rested upon the prestige of power. The epic *Nürgun Bootur* provides the model for the hero's plenary powers in the aforementioned incident where Odun Biis, Cangis Khaan, and Dyilga Toyon, the managers of human fortune, are chosen as "leaders" at the council of divine elders (OYUNSKY 1975, 12, 346). This trio serves, on the one hand, as a legal body at "the court" of the supreme deity Yürüng Ayii Toyon. On the other, it is also without question the highest juridical authority for the population of the Middle World. One might thus infer that the administration of justice (within the limits of customary regulations) is also part of the totality of the epic leader's functions.

In the end, though, it is the heroes themselves who provide the most authoritative statements of their own powers and duties. For example, a certain Alaatir Ala Tuygun addresses the following words to an enemy: "I . . . am predestined . . . to rescue the deceased, protect the remaining, gather the departed, and collect the scattered. I am the protector of the eight clans of *ayii-aymagha*" (YEMELYANOV 1980, 330). Khan Jargistai provides further clues in a speech to his helper and close friend, his "slave" Yöksükülläkh, before the former's departure on a journey: "Until I return, graze my cattle, take charge of the people! Don't offend old men and women!" (KHUDYAKOV 1890, 217, 220). We can see here a general description of a chief's duties: governing the people (gathering them together, making arrangements), protecting them, caring for the cattle, and maintaining fairness (protecting the weak). Thus the hero is a master, a protector, and a judge, roles that are coupled with such heroic traits as courage and enormous strength. Death does not frighten the hero because of his divine protection and his own ability to resist foes. These qualities create among the audience of the *olonxo* an image of the ideal ruler.

TRANSFER OF THE HERO'S STATUS AND PROPERTY

It is worth noting here that the *olonxo*, being a folklore reflection of real society, addresses also such practical issues as the distribution of the hero-ruler's wealth and the inheritance of his status and authority following his death. Before we consider the usual ways in which such power transfer was carried out, let us first briefly mention a few *untypical* examples. We have already noted the case of Karak Khan Toyon, who

attempts to leave his title and his authority to rule to his son-in-law Sordokhai; Sordokhai, however, declines, as he is interested only in his young wife, the *toyon*'s daughter (OVCHINNIKOV 1904, 8). Another unusual case is that of the heroine Kilinnakh-kis, who transfers her property to a servant. The unmarried heroine, departing in search of her missing horse, promises to bequeath her whole wealth to her "faithful slave" Oroiko Dokhsun, on the condition that he apply himself seriously in her absence, "so that my wealth will not decrease" (PRIKLONSKY 1891, 178). All ends well: the maiden returns home unharmed, and, later, marries Oroiko Dokhsun. Thus in the end the question of an untypical property transfer no longer arises, since after Kilinnakh-kis's death her property simply passes on to her widower, and later to the couple's children.

As this suggests, the typical mode of property transfer in the *olonxo* is within the nuclear family. This priority in the transfer of rank and fortune is reflected in a line from one of the stories: "I have no family, so there is nobody to whom I might hand down my belongings" (POPOV 1937, 203). The question then is, Are children able to assert their rights as heirs? Originally this may not have been possible in the case of the property (at least when the property had been accumulated personally by the father), but with respect to the father's status it quite probably was. Let us recall the case of Khaptagai Batir's son, who through his ruthlessness proved his right to the status of *toyon* once voluntarily entrusted to his father by the tribe the latter had conquered. This may not have been possible in all cases, however — a hero is proclaimed the leader of a people on the basis of his individual merit, but such merit is not necessarily possessed by his son. Heroic qualities, for better or worse, are not always transmitted from parent to child.

Nevertheless, at a certain stage in the development of a society a chief's offspring acquire the prerogatives and privileges of chiefdom solely on the basis of having been born in the chief's family. The embryonic form of a tribal military nobility begins to take shape here. There is, for example, the case of the descendants of the hero Er-Sogotokh. Beriet Bergen, Er-Sogotokh's son, becomes a hero himself (and is honored with a "personal" *olonxo*), but his own son "grows up an ordinary man without a high-sounding name" (that is, without even the sort of rudimentary title that we saw above). Yet Beriet Bergen's son is remembered as the forefather of the Yakuts (YEMEL'YANOV 1980, 82). This seems opposed to the usual principle of heredity in the clan, according to which the post of supreme ruler is transmitted not in a descending, dynastic line, but to brothers and nephews. A possible reason for such a transition is that the grandson of the *ulus*'s founder, though not a hero himself, succeeds to the

leadership position of his father and grandfather leader by force of inertia.

Another case indicative of the inheritance of leadership by the descendant of a hero despite the loss of heroic qualities is provided in an *olonxo* about the brothers Elik Bootur and Nyigil Bootur. Elik, the elder, is smaller and frailer than his brother Nyigil, and lacks the latter's heroic qualities. Furthermore, the epic deals almost entirely with the exploits of Nyigil, indicating that he is the true hero of the tale. Yet when the brothers divide their hero father's possessions, Nyigil gives the father's clothes to Elik and takes only a knife for himself, declaring to his brother, "You alone have inherited our father's legacy . . . and you were born earlier" (YEMELYANOV 1980, 164, 168). Since Elik wears his father's clothes he succeeds to his father's position, but he embodies leadership without heroic qualities. Here one can see a recognition of the right of primogeniture, irrespective of the actual virtues of the firstborn.

SUMMARY

The Yakut heroic epos provide a basis upon which to derive a general picture of the epic hero's social status. This figure is a peculiar projection of the actual tribal chief, insofar as the parameters of the chief's status are attributable to the hero. Taken as a whole, the hero's status is based upon the following considerations.

1. The hero, as head of the epic society, is Heaven's creature. This becomes apparent either through his divine parentage or through the magical participation of divine forces in his birth. The gods take part in the hero's subsequent fate — they determine the course of his life, allot him an area to live in and rule over, and help him overcome various obstacles.

2. These mystical components of a chief's charisma are usually accompanied by heroic physical and mental qualities, which serve as reasons for the conquered subjects' submission to the hero.

3. All three of these elements — divine origin, individual virtue, and recognition by fellow tribesmen — form the constituents of a primary conception of supreme power. In more developed social structures they combine to form a general doctrine of supreme rule, but in the *olonxo* the earlier historical stage is maintained. In the Yakut epics these elements exist separately of each other, being represented in independent texts.

4. The ruler assumes such fundamental roles as master of the herds and as head, judge, and protector of the people. These roles, too, are integral to the conception of supreme power found in any chiefdom

or early state.

5. The Yakut epics depict a society in which property was no longer held by the clan in general but by the family. Hence power came to be seen as belonging to a particular family group, not to an all-powerful council of tribal elders. For this reason the characters of the *olonxo* often transfer "administrative" authority to their children, like property. The historical verisimilitude of such transfers is suggested by the fact that the children do not necessarily succeed to their parents' heroic qualities. This is the fourth, immediately pre-state, way of acquisition of power, i.e., that by right of succession. Thus the *olonxo* portray a society that finds itself on the eve of the appearance of more complex structures, such as exist in chiefdoms and early states.

NOTES

1. The predetermined aspects of the hero's existence may also include his life span. For example, the *abaasi* (ghost) elder Timir Dyigistei dies three times and is revived three times, in accordance with predestination (OYUNSKY 1975, 48).

2. The Tree means the sacred world tree that transpierces the three worlds.

3. *Ayii-aymagha* is the designation for humankind as a whole.

4. A possible exception is found in a heroic legend about six warriors who arrive on the bank of the Lena River and tell the natives there about "their head and king." "God evidently comes and talks with him God appointed him to have power over all people" (KHUDYAKOV 1890, 51). Here God appoints a king who remains associated with him, and this association is the basis for the king's claim to world-supremacy.

5. To be sure, there is a hierarchical distance between these two categories of nobility. The hero Kulun Kullustuur obeys the order of the *toyons* council to appear before it ("How could I not come when the powerful *toyons* have called?"), and later, in obedience to their sentence, makes off for a prison on his own (TIMOFEEV-TEPLOUKHOV 1985, 335, 341-42).

6. Significantly, it is a native elder who speaks on behalf of the entire tribe, in conformity with the hierarchy of social position and age in the clan community.

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