



Mythic Discourses

Studies in Uralic Traditions

Edited by
Frog, Anna-Leena Siikala and Eila Stepanova

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Edited by Frog, Anna-Leena Siikala & Eila Stepanova

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Preface

Myths are both representations of present-day discourses in local communities and manifestations of the *longue durée* of culture. In handling the reasons for human and social existence, diverse mythologies answer the same key questions, even though the conclusions and their poetic expressions vary from culture to culture. Mythologies may appear confused or confusing because they present the basic ideas of vernacular worldview and its accompanying system of values in mythic images and metaphoric language, full of conflicting ideas. When addressing both cultural and existential questions, myths create a connection to the principal events of the past, and in so doing, they gather together a social whole united by ideas of a common origin. As shown, for example, by *Kalevala*, the mythic epic of Finns and Karelians, myths are important tools for creating a sense of self-defined identity. Therefore, research into mythic traditions has been vital in interpretations of “European” cultural capital and in distinguishing the characteristic cultural features of small ethnic groups.

In Finland, research into Uralic languages and cultures has a strong tradition, beginning with M. A. Castrén, Elias Lönnrot, Kai and Otto Donner, Julius and Kaarle Krohn, A. Kannisto, K. F. Karjalainen, T. Lehtisalo, Uno Harva and Martti Haavio. Mythology provides valuable material for research on language and culture. This was already apparent in the 19th century, when researchers interested in Finno-Ugrian languages and cultures conducted field work among scattered North European native cultures and Siberian peoples. Consequently, the research and resources of these interrelated areas of study have been intimately interconnected from the very outset. A remarkable number of collections of folklore and folk poetry as well as monographic studies on Uralic religions were published. Owing especially to the work of the Finno-Ugric Society and the Finnish Literature Society, a great deal of the mythology of the Finno-Ugric linguistic area is available for study. Both in Russia and Finland as well as in Hungary and Estonia, many generations of researchers have applied themselves to the collection, publication and investigation of these materials. As a result, research into Uralic mythologies has a particularly good infrastructure with archives, libraries and new field work collections – resources which it pays to exploit. On the other hand, a great part of this knowledge has been gathered by Russian researchers and it has remained unknown to many researchers in the West. One goal of the present collection is to raise awareness and open discussion between these different research traditions.

The study of mythic traditions has recently grown in importance in Western Europe. This is partly because new archaeological methods and linguistic findings have opened new directions in the study of pre-history, and on the other hand, this is the outcome of considering the identification of a common European heritage important for uniting Europe socially to support its unification within a common political entity. In Finland, the 150 year jubilees for the first published edition of the (*Old*) *Kalevala* in 1985, and

for the greatly revised and expanded second edition of the (*New*) *Kalevala* in 1999, have rekindled interest in Kalevala-meter oral poetry, bringing new approaches and new questions concerning the singers, their local communities, performance and variation of this poetry. These approaches have opened a broad field for research and many of the new paths still await investigation. A new wave of interest in mythology and ethnic religions has also been observed in the different Republics of post-Soviet Russia. Young artists of Finno-Ugrian Republics, for example, follow the modern trend in the globalising world in their quest for mythology.

Uralic languages (Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic languages) are spoken by indigenous peoples of Northern Eurasia in the territory extending from Fennoscandia to West Siberia. Even if Uralic groups are linguistically related, their histories and social, economic and cultural life differ greatly. In addition, all these ethnic groups or nations have had different linguistic, cultural, social and religious contacts with other groups and nations during their long and various histories. Many Uralic groups have maintained and recreated their religious and mythological traditions in spite of the fact that the traces of archaic religious systems have merged with the ethnic religions of neighbouring peoples and also with world religions propagated by the churches. The religious and mythic traditions of Uralic peoples are therefore especially rich and versatile, reflecting the cultural history of Northwest Eurasia. Both comparative research and fieldwork-based studies focusing on the contemporary cultures benefit from a knowledge of vernacular Uralic mythic traditions, and it is therefore important to raise awareness of modern perspectives on these traditions and make those perspectives more accessible.

These thoughts were the point of departure for the international project, the *Encyclopaedia of Uralic Mythologies* series, initiated by Russian, Finnish and Hungarian researchers, financed by the Academy of Finland, and published by Akadémiai Kiadó (Budapest) and the Finnish Literature Society (Helsinki). It became clear in the meetings and symposiums of this project which took place in Helsinki, and particularly at a symposium during the Tartu Finno-Ugric Conference (2004), that new, common venues for publication were necessary for the extensive international network of researchers interested in Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic cultures. From these discussions, the basic idea for the present book was born – the idea that researchers representative of different Uralic groups and research on those groups examine the vernacular mythologies of their respective cultures. This idea has gradually evolved into the aspiration and the hope that drawing these researchers of diverse backgrounds together will open its own evolving discourse. This will offer new and reciprocal insights into each culture's traditions and their metamorphoses as well as offer deeper perspectives and understandings of these cultures and aspects of their shared (and unshared) cultural heritage.

Mythic Discourses brings together a broad range of scholars to address the many facets of myth in Uralic cultures. Because the mythologies of the Uralic peoples differ considerably, mythology is understood here in a broad sense, including not only myths proper but also information about religious

beliefs and associated rituals. Many articles of this volume address mythic discourses in the present day or in the wake of process of modernization, examining how aspects of vernacular heritage continue to function as social resources through emergent interpretations and revaluations. Studies emphasizing the synchronic dynamism of living traditions are paralleled by articles examining diachronic processes, investigating continuities in mythic images, motifs, myths and genres. The synchronic and diachronic emphases are complementary, matching perspectives on the dynamism of mythic discourses in living and changing cultural contexts with perspectives on the *longue durée* of these traditions and their transformations. The remarkable range and breadth of Uralic cultures discussed, extending from diverse living cultures to evidence of a common cultural heritage or early cultural contacts, offers a significantly richer and more developed perspective on Uralic traditions than any one article could accomplish alone.

The articles of *Mythic Discourses* are organized into four parts. As the most characteristic feature of a mythology tends to be its mythic figures and the narratives attached to them, the first part of the collection consists of five articles on “Gods and Their Stories”. These articles address traditions of anthropomorphic gods and heroes as well as narratives associated with them – or, more accurately, the constellations of images and events that make up the narrative cores of myths. They focus on the place of these figures and their narratives in the history of cultural discourse. Across this group of articles, emphasis is distributed between the transformations and negotiations of mythic traditions and conceptions in the wake of modernity on the one hand, and historical and comparative discussions of the *longue durée* of these traditions on the other. Together, they provide an essential background for subsequent parts of the collection and their diverse perspectives on the emergence, cultural activity and metamorphoses of traditions through mythic discourses. The second part of the collection, comprised of four articles, is “*Sampo*”, addressing diverse mythic discourses that intersect surrounding a single, dynamic mythic image. Mythic images are perhaps the most central, fundamental and most richly contested elements in mythic discourses, and the object called *sampo* in Finno-Karelian mythology is perhaps the most mysterious and extensively discussed mythic image in all of Uralic mythologies. These articles variously address the dynamism and metamorphoses of this image in living cultural contexts, its *longue durée*, and also that of figures and narratives attached to it. The third part of the collection turns from intersections of mythic discourses surrounding a central mythic image to distinctions and divisions of such discourses connected with fundamental distinctions within a culture. This part, “Gender, Genre and Mythic Patterns”, consists of four articles addressing variation at the intersection of gender and genre, with considerations of patterns emergent within corpora across genres and cultural practices. The concluding part of *Mythic Discourses* narrows still further to consider socially constructed realities in space and time through cultural practices in “Place, Space and Time”. These five articles build on preceding discussions in examinations of the role of mythic discourses to inform and construct basic understandings of the world where beliefs,

location, narration and/or ritual meet. The closing contributions bring discussion full circle by returning to the theme of gods, this time in relation to sacred sites and ritual practice, and to cultural contacts and the *longue durée* of mythic images in the construction of the landscape.

“Gods and Their Stories” opens with a foundational discussion by Anna-Leena Siikala (University of Helsinki) that introduces theories of and methodological approaches to myths and mythology. Siikala’s contribution provides a general background and context for discussions of mythology, its sources and mythic discourse in later articles, opening questions and issues ranging from comparative studies and long-term perspectives to current revaluations and revitalizations of traditions in the present day. Ülo Valk (University of Tartu) advances discussion in a sensitive treatment of mythic discourses surrounding thunder in Estonian folklore. Valk offers a valuable exposition of the transition and transformation of vernacular traditions of the thunder-god and his adversary the devil through the social processes of change incited by modernity and alternative ideologies carried through scientific explanations and textbook education. Lauri Harvilahti (Finnish Literature Society) and Elina Rahimova (Institute of World Literature, Moscow, Russian Academy of Science) pick up the theme of adaptations of mythic traditions to a modern milieu in the case of Lemminkäinen of Finno-Karelian kalevalaic poetry, and employ this discussion as a springboard for exploring the problematics of comparative study in attempting to open the *longue durée* of a tradition’s history. Harvilahti and Rahimova open by contrasting Elias Lönnrot adaptation of Lemminkäinen into *Kalevala* for Romantic and nationalist ends with the life of this figure in the oral epic tradition, and then turn to outline diverse typological parallels in other cultures that have held the often deceptive promise of illuminating the background or origins of Lemminkäinen’s epic and tragic death. Clive Tolley (University of Turku) advances further into the problems of comparative research, examining the unexpected course taken by a mythic motif associated with Uralic traditions, and transferred from god to god prior to its emerge in Norse Germanic mythology. Tolley raises important questions about how we think about cultural history and myths as cultural heritage. Vladimir Napolskikh (Udmurt State University) closes the section with his vast survey of a world-creation myth, contextualizing the Uralic tradition in a much broader frame. Napolskikh correlates the cultural distribution of the myth with genetic markers to propose a correspondence between cultural practices of mythological narrative transmission and genetic ethnic heritage.

“*Sampo*” presents four articles connecting with diverse aspects of that most prominent and mysterious mythic image of Finno-Ugric mythologies, the *sampo* of Finno-Karelian kalevalaic poetry. Lotte Tarkka (University of Helsinki) opens the discussion with an exploration of how the mysterious *sampo* functioned in the mythology and poetry of Viena Karelia. Tarkka’s synchronic focus emphasizes the dynamism of this mythic image as a social resource in both broad social processes as well as in personal and potentially unique imaginal interpretations. Veikko Anttonen (University of Turku) turns from this synchronic dynamism to a conceptual and semantic

approach to the contents of mythological and religious terms. Anttonen offers a valuable overview of the debate surrounding the *sampo*, addressing it as a symbol at the intersection of recorded evidence and its historical roots, and he lays out an approach to the *sampo* as a cultural and semiotic phenomenon. Pekka Hakamies (University of Turku) shifts attention from the *sampo* as an object to the figure of Ilmarinen, the mythic smith who is its creator, with a look at the associated technology identified with this figure. Hakamies assesses impacts of the introduction of iron-working technologies on Finno-Karelian mythology and examines the mythic discourse engendered by new technologies related to utopian fantasies. Frog (University of Helsinki) draws the section to a close by advancing from the mythic image of the *sampo* and figure that creates it to the system of narrative material within which these appear, looking at the role of narrative as a tool for the construction, negotiation and manipulation of images and figures in mythic discourses. Frog develops long-term perspectives to highlight the stratified transformations that provided the mythology with renewed currency in changing cultural contexts before turning to a rich stratum of Germanic models and the social-historical processes through which they were engaged to produce a unique mythological cycle.

“Gender, Genre and Mythic Patterns” opens with Eila Stepanova’s (University of Helsinki) discussion of laments, a women’s genre found across Finno-Ugric cultures, reconnecting with the opening theme of gods through a case study of the mythic being or beings referred to as *syndyzet* in Karelian laments. Stepanova examines this term’s use by lament sub-genre correlated with kalevalaic poetry and other evidence to reveal alternative mythologies associated with the women’s tradition in which archaic vernacular conceptions of a Great *Synty* evolved differently. Galina Mišarina (University of Helsinki) builds on the introduction to laments with a treatment of a special Komi genre in which the lament tradition is employed as an incantation to expel pests. Mišarina opens by addressing the problematics of approaching the genre of this tradition before turning to a discussion of alternative uses of full ritual patterns as a form of mythic discourse. Irina Il’ina (Komi Scientific Centre) and Oleg Uljašev (Komi Scientific Centre) expand the examination of Komi traditions to offer an overview of mythic patterns associated with gender in Komi-Zyrjan culture. Il’ina and Uljašev offer perspectives on myths, magic and beliefs revealing two, co-existing cultural strata each bound to a gender, neither of which predominates over the other. Vera Survo (University of Helsinki) concludes the section with an overview of mythic images represented in Karelian embroideries – an area of women’s cultural competence comparable to lamenting – and their role in the ritual life of the community. Vera Survo provides comparisons and contrasts to the embroidery traditions of other cultures in the region and outlines aspects of the development of traditions related to embroideries in the modern era.

“Place, Space and Time” presents five articles on intersections of mythic discourse with space and time in the social construction of place. Karina Lukin (University of Helsinki) opens the discussion with narrative traditions concerning the landscape among the Nenets in the present day,

focusing on the traditions surrounding the death of the last shaman in a local community. Lukin situates narrations of this event between belief traditions and social realities on the one hand, as well as between the Soviet construction of the “last shaman” as a modern mythic image and vernacular conceptions of transition to the modern era on the other. Arno Survo (University of Helsinki) turns attention to the multiple valuations and conflicting tendencies in the study of vernacular religion and traditions in Ingria. Arno Survo illustrates this discussion of the ideological attitudes of researchers and their construction of Ingria as a cultural area through the example of discourse surrounding an enigmatic multilingual manuscript found in St. Petersburg. Aado Lintrop (Estonian Literary Museum) returns to broad comparative perspectives, surveying typological parallels in the relationship of particular beliefs and uses of certain genres to conceptions of cyclic time in Finno-Ugric cultures. Concentrating on Estonian and Udmurt traditions, Lintrop offers insights into relationships of cultural practices to conceptions of time and space in the negotiation of boundaries of and encounters with the otherworld. Nadežda Šutova (Udmurt Institute for History, Language and Literature) draws this section back to the themes introduced in the opening of the collection, addressing of several lesser-known gods of the Udmurts. Šutova begins her discussion with a variety of beliefs and cultural practices associated with these figures before turning to a case study on sacred sites surrounding a particular Udmurt village. In the concluding article of the collection, Arja Ahlqvist (University of Helsinki) presents a survey of her extensive fieldwork and research on the so-called “Blue Stone” as a site in living landscapes. Ahlqvist draws together many themes addressed in earlier articles as she unearths the background of this phenomenon, showing that in some regions these sacred stones were assimilated by Slavic groups from now-extinct Finno-Ugric cultures and arguing that the distribution of the “Blue Stone” tradition combines with other evidence to suggest a potentially Finno-Ugric heritage.

Although the individual articles often focus primarily on traditions in a single Uralic culture, these articles open a discourse with one another – a discourse which can only become fully realized through the reader. Together, the articles of *Mythic Discourses* allow the discussions of each part of the collection and also of the collection as a whole to offer a much richer and dynamic perspective on Uralic cultures, both historically and in the present day, than any one article could possibly accomplish alone.

Combining the forces of researchers of Finno-Ugric and more generally Uralic cultures has faced the challenges posed by the diversity of the contributors’ languages and the very different research traditions to which they belong. This collection has undergone a long process of translation and editing, during which new contributions were also selected for the volume. We would like to thank Marja-Leea Hattuniemi, who made the initial translations of many articles for the collection. The original idea for the book belonged to Anna-Leena Siikala, who also participated in the editing process. The central editorial and linguistic tasks were tackled by Frog, who selected new articles with the other two editors, and carefully edited the whole volume. Eila Stepanova’s expertise was especially important in

editing the Russian articles, and she together with Frog translated the texts as well as participated in shaping the volume as a whole.

We would like to express our appreciation to the Department of Folklore Studies of the University of Helsinki, which offered an inspiring and supportive milieu for our work. We would also like to thank several researchers of the department who took part in writing for this volume. Cooperation with the Komi Research Centre (Uralic Division, Russian Academy of Science) has been both valuable and fruitful during the years required by this work, as have been the contacts with researchers of Udmurt State University, the University of Tartu, the Estonian Literary Museum, and also Karelian researchers who were involved in this undertaking at different stages. Our sincerest appreciation also goes out to the many other individuals, organizations and institutions that have helped, over this long period, to make this publication possible through their advice and support in diverse capacities. Finally, we would like to thank the Academy of Finland, whose financial support was essential in launching the initiative which has come to fruition in the present collection.

*12.12.12 Helsinki, Finland
Frog, Anna-Leena Siikala, Eila Stepanova*

Note on Transliteration

Cyrillic script has been transliterated according to the scientific system of transliteration.

Cyrillic	Transliteration
А а	a
Б б	b
В в	v
Г г	g
Д д	d
Е е	e
Ё ё	ë
Ж ж	ž
З з	z
И и	i
Й й	j
К к	k
Л л	l
М м	m
Н н	n
О о	o
П п	p
Р р	r
С с	s
Т т	t
У у	u
Ф ф	f
Х х	x
Ц ц	c
Ч ч	č
Ш ш	š
Щ щ	šč
Ы ы	y
Ь ь	'
Ъ ъ	ě
Э э	è
Ю ю	ju
Я я	ja

In some articles, Komi language text appears according to a Latin script for Komi rather than a transliteration of the Cyrillic form of Komi. Latinate characters in Udmurt Cyrillic script have been retained in transliteration. The Cyrillic script of significant individual words or short phrases has often been presented in parentheses or quotations in order to reduce ambiguity for the benefit of research in these areas.

Gods and Their Stories

I

Mythic discourses in the present day show how vernacular heritage continues to function and be valuable through emergent interpretations and revaluations. At the same time, continuities in mythic images, motifs, myths and genres reveal the *longue durée* of mythologies and their transformations. The eighteen articles of *Mythic Discourses* address the many facets of myth in Uralic cultures, from the Finnish and Karelian world-creation to Nenets shamans, offering multidisciplinary perspectives from twenty eastern and western scholars. The mythologies of Uralic peoples differ so considerably that mythology is approached here in a broad sense, including myths proper, religious beliefs and associated rituals. Traditions are addressed individually, typologically, and in historical perspective. The range and breadth of the articles, presenting diverse living mythologies, their histories and relationships to traditions of other cultures such as Germanic and Slavic, all come together to offer a far richer and more developed perspective on Uralic traditions than any one article could do alone.



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