

THE MYTHOLOGICAL PLOTS ABOUT THE CREATION OF THE WORLD AND HUMAN BEINGS IN THE ERZYAN EPIC, *MASTORAVA*

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- **ABSTRACT:** The article is devoted to the principles of contamination myths, stories, and tales about the creation of the world and human beings in the Erzyan epic, *Mastorava*, by A. Sharonov. This article focuses on the specifics of the development of folk stories and characters, the connection between Gods and people in the authentic works, and the projection of authentic motifs and heroes onto the author's text. Unlike the authentic epic, the literary epic consists of different genres joined by the author's idea. There is the dominance of the epic genres (myths, legends, tales), as well as some proverbs, ritual, and lyrical songs. The symbiosis of different genres, plots, motifs, and characters makes a unique literary work based on folklore material. There are no *Kalevala*, *Kalevipoeg*, or *Mastorava* in Finnish, Estonian, and Erzyan folklore. All of them are the creation of authors. The main task of the literary epic is to put the ancient epic text into a new shell according to the author's aesthetic and philosophical principles, based on contemporary ideas about history, mythology, and culture. The literary form of the epic is not an improvisation. It is the result of an author's many years of work. The author creates a literary scheme and then fills it with material. The traditional heroic epic has a folk idea about the creation of the world, mythology, and history, as well as ideas about an ideal tsar, an ideal society, and moral views. All of these are usually recreated and harmoniously transformed

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by the author into a literary version of the epic. The ancient heroes and plots were returned to most of the people and became the wealth of a national consciousness which received renewed life in the *Mastorava*, which conveys the history of Erzya.

- **KEYWORDS:** Myth. Epic. Epic hero. Epic legend. Motif. Plot. World creation. Creation of the human beings. Combination (or contamination). Literary version. Author's conception. Poetic word.

Introduction

The frontier of the XX-XXI centuries inaugurated a renaissance of Erzyan ethnicity and interest in the past of the Erzyan nation, spurred the development of a national literature, and drew new attention to poetry as a way of increasing emotional and aesthetic impact. The publication of the epic, *Mastorava*, in 1994 generally increased that process (SHARONOV, 1994). Alexander Sharonov was writing the Erzyan epic for more than twenty years. It was published during the period when the Erzyan people were able to perceive it through the prism of a universal picture of the world, when the life of an individual was raised to the historical level. The appearance of *the Mastorava* coincided with the general desire of the ethnos to realize its highest ethnic cultural needs.

There is a big cultural need for modern Finno-Ugrians to express themselves by creating literary epics (*the Biarmia*, *the Mastorava*, *the Dorvizhi*, *the Yugorno*, and so on). Alexander Sharonov wrote *the Mastorava* as an original version of the Erzyan heroic epic, enclosed in the literary form of a mythological-heroic epic that included myths, songs, and stories. As a result, Sharonov gave a new sound to the ancient legends and succeeded in bringing alive every detail and characteristic (of the heroes, characters, clothes, weapons, and so on) and every action of the Erzyan tales. In the "Mastorava" epos, A. M. Sharonov uses folklore material written in XIX century by P. I. Melnikov-Pechersky, the Russian specialist of folklore, and included into "The Mordovian Essays" (MELNIKOV, 1981) book by him. For example, myths about creation of earth, gods and human being by the supreme god of Erzyan people called Ineshkipaz (Cham-Pas) and a myth about Ange, the goddess of beauty and the wife of Cham-Pas. Besides, the songs of mythological content with the same plot which have been written down in the end of XIX - beginning of XX centuries by the Finnish folklore specialist H. Paasonen in the territories of the Volga region, which formed 8 volumes of folklore texts "Mordwinische Volksdichtung" (KAHLA, 1977) were used.

While working over text, A. M. Sharonov made expeditions to Kuznetsky, Kameshkirsky and Shemysheisky districts of the Penza Region, to Lukoyanovsky and Shatkovsky districts of the Gorkovsky Region, to Tetyushsky district of the Tatar ASSR. During the expeditions, he wrote down heroic legends about Tyushtyan tsar, about Narchatka duchess and a number of other epic works which formed the basis of "Mastorava". In particular, "Tyushtya and the White Swan" legend from A. A. Kumanev, the director of Lukoyanovsky teacher training college was written down in Lukoyanove town.

The folklore material derived by A. M. Sharonov from collected works of P. I. Melnikov-Pechersky and H. Paasonen and written down independently during folklore expeditions served as a foundation of the book epos. A. M. Sharonov has only a little bit changed the form, because the author's text presupposes adherence to the main principle - integrity of form and content. The ideological component of folklore texts was retained by the author.

The main task of this research work is to analyze the harmony of authentic material inside *the Mastorava*, to highlight the author's combination of plots based on many separate folk epic plots and motifs about the creation of the world and human beings.

The history *the Mastorava* epic research has started at the moment of its publication in 1994 followed by a number of favorable responses both in Russia and abroad. The Finns T. Hakkarainen (1999) and P. Lentonen (1998) became the first foreign reviewers of the book introducing it to European readers as the third Finno-Ugric epic preceded by *the Kalevala* and *the Kalevipoeg*, thus confirming its high rating. Gradually scientific comprehension of the Mastorava takes place revealing various aspects of the potential possessed by epic as a literary form.

Sharonov's works were analyzed by E. A. Fedoseeva (2007), A. A. Gagaev et al. (2015), M. Dugantsy (1999), O. Ingle (2013, 2014), N. Abrosimova (2015), E. A. Sharonova¹, and others. E. Fedoseeva was the first one to view the history of Mordovian epic literary forms' formation introducing the Mastorava of Sharonov as a valid literary work - the result of Erzyans' cultural striving for the creation of the national literary history. A. A. Gagaev first analyzed *the Mastorava* within its philosophical aspirations by touching upon the problems of the philosophy of culture and objective reality of Erzyan, Moksha and Russian people based on the epic philosophy. N. Abrosimova views the language of *the Mastorava* as a standard of the Erzyan literary language.

M. Dugantsy introduces *the Mastorava* epic to the international scientific context having previously analyzed and translated it into the Hungarian language. O. Ingle performs a contrasting analysis of the three Finno-Ugric epics.

Our analysis differs from the previous studies by its main task, and by the analysis of the different plots.

From our point of view, the outstanding talent of Sharonov made the ancient Erzyan songs and legends be actual again and get a new artistic power at the frontier of the new millennium marked by different aesthetic preferences (GOYE, 2008; INASARIDZE; NASKIDASHVILI, 2015; YAKUSHKINA, 2016; GUDKOVA; DUBROVSKAYA; SHARONOVA, 2013; SHARONOVA; NALDEEVA; IVANITSKIJ, 2013). The architectonics of *the Mastorava* reproduce the natural structure of the authentic historical epic (FOLEY, 1991). At the same time, it reflects the author's scientific and artistic conception of the cosmogonic myth (LEEMING, 2009; OSOVSKIY; DUBROVSKAYA,

¹ Cf. Aleksandr Markovich Sharonov and Elena Aleksandrovna Sharonova (2010); Elena Aleksandrovna Sharonova (2010, 2014, 2015); Elena Aleksandrovna Sharonova, O. I. Naldeeva and A. I. Ivanitskij (2013); Elena Aleksandrovna Sharonova, Svetlana Petrovna Gudkova and Svetlana Anatol'yevna Dubrovskaya (2013, 2014); Elena Aleksandrovna Sharonova and Valentina Nikolayevna Anoshina (2014); Elena Aleksandrovna Sharonova and Aleksandr Markovich Sharonov (2015).

2014; PIVKINA, 2016; PRINCE, 2003) and Erzyan heroic poetry. Being the base for the author's work the folk material loses its main indications and obeys the author's idea.

The contribution of the present research into the world science lies in problems and issues actualization related to the genre principles of the epic literary form definition. Since the epic literary form is rather popular not only in Russian and Finno-Ugric culture, but in Finnish (the Kalevala by E. Lönnrot), Estonian (the Kalevipoeg by Kreitswald), Latvian, the research dedicated to the analysis of Erzyan epic (the Mastorava by Sharonov) as well, this research will promote and deepen the interest expressed toward this phenomenon, as well as expand the problem range where it can be viewed and dealt with.

Materials and methods

The historical-typological, historical-genetic, and descriptive research methods are used in this article. The set of methods allows us to analyze *the Mastorava* by A. M. Sharonov, specifically its plot and motifs, to identify its typological and national characteristics, its artistic originality, and to explain the poetic nature of the author's work. By using the descriptive method, the plots and motifs about the creation of the world and man are described.

Literature Review

The results of the research of the mythological story lines about the creation of the world and human beings in *the Mastorava* seem to be original and new due to the fact that no other scientist has ever undertaken the study of this aspect before A. A. Gagaev and others have touched upon this aspect against the background of the interest expressed towards this epic. A. A. Gagaev ("Ugro-Finnish cosmos-psyche-logic", "The philosophy of the Mordovian fairy-tale")² in the PhD research papers: "Mordovian epic poem" by E. N. Kirkina (2001), "The historical cultural base of the epic about Tusht: folk-literary versions" by I. A. Gurjanova (2006), "Literary forms of the Mordovian heroic epic: creation and evolution" by E. A. Fedoseeva (2007), "Mythological motifs in Mordovian epic poetry" by N. N. Virjasova (2008), and "Literary forms of the Finno-Ugrians: typology and poetics" by O. P. Ingle (2015).

Domestic experience of research of the epic literary form in general, and Erzyan *the Mastorava* in particular, can contribute to the world and especially Finno-Ugric science. The perspective of the epic literary form research implies the use of scientific achievements made in the present article.

The beginning of the 21st century offers unlimited opportunities for establishing international contacts, as well as for acquiring valuable scientific experience of colleagues from other countries. Due to the scientists' joint efforts the canon of the epic literary

² Cf. A. Gagaev and Kudaeva (2009); A. Gagaev, P. Gagaev and Kudaeva (2014).

form can be identified and determined. In view of the growth of interest expressed toward the epic literary form in Russian and Finno-Ugric cultures it can be assumed that in the near future a big-scale study of this phenomenon and its various aspects may take place in Finno-Ugristics (ZHUK; TUZOVA, 2015).

Results

The aim of this research work is to analyze the harmony of authentic material inside the author's literary form, *the Mastorava*, to highlight the author's combination of plots based on many separate folk epic plots and motifs about the creation of the world and human beings. The research of mythological plots related to the creation of the world and human-beings in *the Mastorava* implies solving the following issues: to determine the main characters of the heroic epic, namely the supreme gods Ineshkipaz, Ange, Purginepaz, and even Shaitan, who took part in the creation of the world; and such heroes as Tyushtyan, who contributed to Ezryan society formation and functioning at the very early stages of the statehood; to prove that the contents of the heroic epic, including its literary form, is compiled of the myths related to the creation of the world, humans, heavenly and earthly family, as well as songs and folk tales about electing a tsar and his reign, which collectively make up a multi-faceted narrative; to determine that the *Mastorava* by A. M. Sharonov possesses an authorial intent of authentic heroic epic, built up according to all the requirements of the appropriate literary form.

The main characters of the heroic epic

As in *Elder Edda*, *The Song of the Nibelungs*, the *Kalevala*, and other epics, the main characters of *the Mastorava* are Gods and heroes.

According to the classical definition of a hero by A. A. Taho-Godi and E. M. Meletinsky (TOKAREV, 1998), the hero is a son or descendant of God and a mortal. Fulfilling the will of God, he organizes people's lives, bringing them laws and justice. The hero usually has superhuman abilities, he fights and kills monsters, and he calls on his divine parent for help. The hero may also be a king or military leader, a cultural hero, and a demiurge. Heroes of the Erzyan epic meet these criteria. For example, Tyushtyan, the main hero of *the Mastorava*, has all these qualities and acts like a king responsible for world order.

An epic hero is a universal figure. In his actions, he is guided by his concern for the welfare of the human race. Without any doubts, there are some national features and qualities in every epic hero. On the one hand, all opinions and conclusions about an epic hero are relativistic. On the other hand, they are full of admiration, combined with some kind of exaltation, and exclusively focused on his national feeling of having been chosen.

Tyushtyan is the classic type of hero which was formed during the development of Erzya's statehood. In the epic there are many heroic characters such as Azravka, Litava,

and Litovawho became wives of the God of thunder and war, Purginepaz, and who participated in the formation of the heavenly family, such as the hunter, Suralya, who got countless treasures for his people, and Kudadey, who became the founder of a new generation of Erzya, and Tyokshon, who gave the Kudadey clan freedom from the power of the many-headed serpent. The existence of different developmental traditions within a society has often been the catalyst for the creation of these characters. The presence of many heroes in the epic resulted in a combination of different plots and motifs, and brought multilevel diversity to the epic.

Multiple main heroes are depicted in many motifs and plots in the Erzyan heroic epic. All these independent themes (the creation of humans and the world, the appearance of terrestrial and celestial families, the election of the ruler, the struggle against foreign invaders, and so on) are connected by the main theme of Erzyan history. The heroic Mordovian epic was formed as a multi-heroic epic, including many different motifs and plots which were built around the main heroes. It led to the appearance of the later literary epic form.

The creation of the world, humans, heavenly and earthly family, and as authorial intent of authentic heroic epic

At the beginning of *the Mastorava* there are mythological stories about the creation of the earth and sky, about the birth of Ange (the wife of the supreme God Ineshkipaz, the mother of the gods and the goddess of beauty), about the creation of man and three fish (which carry the earth on their backs), about the origin of the Erzyan people, about the creation of the gods and the goddesses, and about the origin of customs and rituals. The literary concept of *the Mastorava* is based on folk materials and on scholarly research by A. M. Sharonov (2001) who defined the heroic epic and mythological themes and characters in accordance with the scientific positions of A. F. Losev, E. M. Meletinsky, N. I. Kravtsov, B. Y. Propp, B. N. Putilov, F. M. Selivanov, and V. P. Anikin. A. M. Sharonov's main idea is that the hero is a creator of the world, and a demiurge of the state and its institutions; and that a heroic epic is a multifaceted story about the origin and development of society. The heroic epic has high self-consciousness and clearly consistent goals that it makes accessible to everyone. It suggests that the national state is the highest level of a nation's being. This thesis is developed in the stories about the creation of world and man.

The epic, recreating the process of the creation of the world, puts Ineshkipaz, the Supreme God of Erzya, on the first place. The story about him is a poetic version of the myths about the creation of the earth in the publication of P. I. Melnikov-Pechersky (MELNIKOV, 1981) and H. Paasonen (KAHLA, 1977). A. M. Sharonov combined several authentic plots which are joined by the name of Ineshkipaz and which created a complete picture of the creation of the world. Ineshkipaz, born before all things, floats on a duck-shaped stone in the virgin ocean. He thinks about the creation of the world and, being upset for not having an assistant, he spits into the water which causes the stone hillock to appear. God strikes the stone hillock with a rod and breaks it into several pieces.

Shaitan appears out of the hillock and offers his assistance. Ineshkipaz accepts him and three times sends him to the bottom of the sea to bring some sand to create the earth. Shaitan tries to be a co-creator, but only spoils the results of God's work. Ineshkipaz is not satisfied with Shaitan's actions but does not stop him. His "program" does not include the prevention of all damages to the earth by Shaitan. However, Ineshkipaz opposes Shaitan and turns evil into good. By doing evil, Shaitan helps some new remarkable things to appear, such as minerals in the mountains, rain clouds in the sky, sailing ships in the sea, springs in the ravines, and so on—which were not in God's mind from the beginning.

In the story, *The Three Fish-Sisters*, the earth is located on the surface of the ocean. In accordance to God's idea, it is held by the three fish in the "great water:" Huso, Stellate Sturgeon, and Sturgeon which are under three sides of the earth: East, South, and West. The fish are holding the earth on their backs. East symbolizes the sunrise, the waking of the Sun. South represents gaining full power, staying in the zenith. West represents extinction, going into oblivion. The myth does not mention the fourth side of the world, the North, because the North is identified with the other world, hell, the residence of Idemevs (who is antithesis of Ineshkipaz). Vested with human speech and mind, God's chosen fish realize their great mission. They know that when the human race deteriorates, and at the command of Ineshkipaz, they will make a great flood to renovate the earth and make room for new people who are free of faults and able to revive the Erzyan ethnos.

The plot of *Three Fish* is connected with the myth of the global flood which was arranged by God to punish people for their sins. There is a motif of sin and the flood in many mythologies. In the Erzyan mythology, the flood is not a result of the water coming from the heavens, as in the mythology of the Mediterranean–Black Sea area (LEEMING, 2009; TOKAREV, 1998). Rather, it is a result of the movement of the ocean by fish who were swimming to serve God in the place appointed to them by Ineshkipaz. It seems that the Erzyan myth contradicts the general concept of the creation of the world. Ineshkipaz puts Huso, Stellate Sturgeon, and Sturgeon under the three sides of the earth already inhabited by people who are independent and do not follow God's commandments. However, the fish are to carry the renovated earth, which is cleansed of unworthy people, and the fish become co-creators of the world. The myth of the Three Wonderful Fish entered into *the Mastorava* in its original form. The author only improved its language. However, the myth gained new meaning when it was included into the global plot of the creation of the world.

After the Legend about Ineshkipaz and the creation of the earth, there is a story about the creation of God's wife, Ange. She appears by his heart's wish: "The Sun and the Water, connect! Give birth to Ange, Ava (female), my wife!" (SHARONOV, 2010, p.31). The sea started rippling and the extremely beautiful Ava (female) appeared on its surface. She wore a white shirt and gold sandals, with the sun on her forehead, with the moon on her crown, and with the stars on the tips of her hair. In *the Mordovian Essays* written by Melnikov-Pechersky (MELNIKOV, 1981), Ange-Patyay is a daughter of the Sun. In *Remains of the Mordovian Mythology*, written by V. N. Mainov (1889), the beautiful woman comes out of the egg which is broken by Ineshkipaz's foot. In *the Mastorava*, Ange arises out of the union of the sun and the water, which is an expression of the author's

creativity. Usually in the myth there is no “frozen beauty formula.” Such beauty formulas appeared later during the classical folk period in many traditions all over the world (HAMLET, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2015). The author empowered Ange with it. That formula shows the heavenly beauty of the heroine (with the sun on her forehead, with the moon on her crown, with the stars on the tips of her hair). Ange also becomes an element of the idea of the creation of the world. Ange gives birth to other great gods, she gives an idea to Ineshkipaz to create a wife for a man, she brings many world creative ideas, and she acts like a cosmic and social demiurge who is also a cultural hero. It is possible to say that she stimulates the universal inspiration. In *the Mastorava*, Ange differs from Ange-Patyay from Melnikov-Pechersky's *Mordovian Essays*. She is full of love for Ineshkipaz, her children, and mankind. Such interpretation of authentic material fits into the art form of *the Mastorava*, which is the literary version of the heroic epic (FEDOSEEVA, 2007; GUDKOVA, 2011). The combination of various mythological stories is acceptable in a literary work if there is no conceptual distortion of the source.

Ineshkipaz creates the world for humans. In doing so, he wants to fulfill his highest aim of establishing life on earth based on principles which will allow mankind realize itself fully. That is why he creates mankind in his own image, gives man a mind, and empowers man with an inexhaustible interest and need to permanently stimulate his creative human nature. In *the Mastorava*, the tale about a man combines several myths which complement each other. At the base there is a song which was recorded by H. Paasonen. Having the idea to create man, Ineshkipaz decides to make the first person Erzyan: “I love Erzya best of all. Erzya is to be on the Mastor first of all. I will make Erzyan language be the first of all. And I will make Erzyan custom” (SHARONOV, 2010, p.33). Ineshkipaz uses an argil for molding man in his own image: tall, broad shoulders, blonde hair, clear eyes, with a calm and beautiful face. Then he leaves man for some time before giving him a soul and spirit. During Ineshkipaz' absence, Idemevs comes and spoils the creation. Ineshkipaz does not correct the damage. Therefore, man receives features from God and from the devil at the same time, and belongs to both of them. The creation of man in *the Mastorava* was followed by the creation of woman, Ava, who is endowed with qualities of goodness. Joining man and woman, God blesses them to live, raise a family, and work.

It is noteworthy that man in *the Mastorava* is divided into the first man who existed before the fall, and the new man who appeared after the fall. Before the fall, he is in a blissful state. He fulfills all the requirements of Ineshkipaz, enjoys his patronage, and does not know disease or hard labor. After the fall, the Supreme God deprives him of rich harvests. Poverty and hunger come to man as punishment for his sins. Social inequality appears at that time.

According to Ineshkipaz's idea, man is the main character on Earth and everything on Earth belongs to him. His main qualities are intelligence, following customs and rituals, physical and spiritual beauty, diligence, desire for harmony with nature, and the desire to live in a society organized on the basis of statehood. Ineshkipaz instructs the Erzyans to establish prayers to the gods who had helped them and who had become cosmic cultural heroes. They were helping man establish economic, social, and cultural life. The rituals were designed to reinforce physical and social existence.

According to the myth, written down by H. Paasonen and published in his collection of works “Mordwinische Volksdichtung” (KAHLA, 1977), the ancient Erzyan people who were under the protection of Ineshkipaz had everything they needed. In this case, cosmogonic myths about creation of the world and election of Tyushtyan tsar, the ruler of Erzyan people, were used. In these myths, the Erzyan people are presented as the chosen people, favoured by Ineshkipaz and governed by Tyushtyan, his grandson. From the point of view of world outlook, these myths are ethnocentric, since they prove ideal features of Erzyan people, their physical and cultural perfection, richness of language, peaceful nature, which is typical for epic poetry in heroic century of the majority of people.

The author of *the Mastorava* combined the thematically similar plots about the creation of the world and about the beginning of life on Earth. He chose the time and sequence of events as elements to make a loose connection between the plots, which helped the author avoid any thematic overlap. Being both a creative and scholarly work, *the Mastorava* subordinated the author’s poetic imagination to the concept of the heroic epic.

According to the myth, the ancient Erzyan people who were under the protection of Ineshkipaz had everything they needed. However, they grew tired of only “good things,” and started to act against their better interests. In the beginning, the sky of Ineshkipaz was closer to Earth. It was possible to touch it from the roof of any house. When Erzyans prayed to Ineshkipaz, asking him for a generous harvest, he saw and heard them immediately and always sent rain. One day that blessed life came to an end. An Erzyan woman began heating the house and put some wood in the fireplace, but the smoke from did not go out the chimney because the chimney’s tube rested against the sky. The woman became angry, took the bent poker, climbed on the roof, and began poking the Creator with it. Ineshkipaz did not want to tolerate that, and he raised the sky higher. When the Erzyans woke up, they saw that the sky had moved farther away. Clearly, the myth contains an ironic subtext that is paradoxical: the act of one foolish woman breaks the harmony between God and man (OSMUHINA, 2013, p.229). The kind Erzyan God heard the people’s pleas for forgiveness, and sent Velenpaz (the God of villages). Ineshkipaz knows everything: in the left hand he holds happiness and gives it to all people in moderation by the right hand. It is clear that the mission of Velenpaz is indirectly associated with the mission of Jesus Christ and Mohammed, both of whom were providing similar educational functions for people. This is not surprising because every national consciousness seeks to create a perfect image of the characters who save their people from moral and physical destruction, and who pay with their life and death for people’s happiness.

An epic narrative is philosophical in its essence. It answers the question of why the world and mankind were created by God. The world was created for man who was to continue the creation of beauty and goodness while realizing his infinite possibilities of mind and soul. The meaning of the world is an ontological idea of man. According to Ineshkipaz’s thought, man includes everything in himself, including Ineshkipaz. God acts, realizes, and gains being through man, and inside man. However, there is Idemevs (the devil), which is why after day there is night, and near light there is darkness. In the

Erzjan myth, the devil is a creation of Ineshkipaz. Ineshkipaz fights with him and does not approve his evil actions, but does not destroy him because he is also a part of the Creator. As a result, they together create the world and man. God is the whole world, Idemevs is its dark side. The myth does not destroy Idemevs because it is clear that that without him it is impossible to explain a lot of phenomena not connected with Ineshkipaz. Now everything looks clear: goodness, beauty, and justice came from Ineshkipaz. Evil, ugliness, and darkness came from Idemevs.

According to Sharonov's concept, a significant reservoir in heroic poetry and songs consists of myths about the creation of gods and men, with family as the base of a reasonable and socially organized life. These stories form the second tale of *the Mastorava*, *The base of the customs and laws of life*, which consists of two parts: *The Wedding of the Gods* and *The Wedding of People*. The process of forming the family is under the control of the Supreme God. He often takes part in the process himself, because it continues the creation of the world at the level of gods and men. The omnipotent gods do not set themselves against the people, and sometimes they even marry them. The compatibility of God's world with the world of people indicates their origin and appearance during the time of undeveloped social relations. The groom is considered to be wealthy. It is his advantage. The bride needs to have ideal beauty. If she is beautiful, nobody pays attention to her estate. Over time, the myths and songs were changed under the influence of socio-cultural conditions.

In the myth, *Purginepaz and Kastargo*, the plot of which is included in the *Mastorava* in the form of an epic legend, the God of Thunder, Purginepaz, is looking for a wife. The Goddess of Harvest, Norovava, is matchmaking for Kastargo, a daughter of Ineshkipaz. The motivation of the marriage is the same as in human society: the desire to have a sweetheart and heirs. The family is considered to be an institution in which a person is realized as a father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, daughter, son, teacher, student, and versatile worker who devotes their life to their collective blood relatives.

A. M. Sharonov's *Mastoravas* trays from the authentic material, but the author's poetic consciousness makes the folk stories and characters become different elements of an artistic and aesthetic system in which they gain additional functions, acquiring the status of literary subjects. The folk characters live within the oral, collective, and anonymous tradition. In *the Mastorava*, all characters and events are joined by the name of the author. They come through the individual consciousness and individual imagination. The author strives for authenticity, trying to preserve the true meaning of the events and characters. The heroic epic finds a second life in the author's form with his clear concept of ideological distinctness, plain language, and perfection of poetic text.

At the beginning of the part, *People's Weddings*, there is a legend, *Mazy Damai* (*Beautiful Damai*), which was based on the famous Erzjan fairy tale (GAGAEV et al., 2016). The hero is an unremarkable man, an orphan, who has only one "jar of butter" in his possession. The fox steals his butter. Then he makes the fox pay for the stolen butter by helping him marry the daughter of Purgineinyazor, The God of Thunder. Damai tricks the many-headed serpent Karyaz and gets his wealth, then he kills the fox and becomes a rich and happy man, the founder of a half-human and half-divine family. After the wedding,

Damai with his young wife “[...] began to live happily and keep a good memory about the fox” (SAMORODOV, 1985, p.149). In that episode, A. M. Sharonov transferred a folk story into the language of a folk song.

By changing the status from an independent plot to the status of one of the story lines of the epic, *Beautiful Damai* was subordinated to the general idea of *the Mastorava*: the reconstruction of the processes of the formation of the moral life laws. Carefully saving the folk plot, the folk characters and their world, and the folk ideology, A. M. Sharonov changed the end of the story. In the author’s story the fox comes to Damai and suggests:

My dear Damai, I love you. My dear Damai, you are my friend. Now you will live so good. You play with your beautiful wife [...] I am not going to ask you for a lot. I do not need an expensive gift. Please, give me a bag full of hens when I visit you tomorrow morning. (SHARONOV, 2010, p.55).

Damai promises to fulfill the wish of the fox, but instead of putting hens in the bag he puts several dogs who tear the deceiving fox into pieces.

The story about Damai completes the ontological aspect of the world order with a moral-psychological aspect. Poor Damai is raised to the top of life, but he did not thank his helper—the fox—and kills it, knowing that the fox who gave him wealth will be able to take it away in the future, because all good things which are not honestly achieved are considered to be imperfect and unsustainable. The author of the epic did not destroy the ideology of the folk character. He changed only a few aspects. In fairytales, it is natural for a hero to thank the fox for the “good” job, but that contradicts the laws of the epic hero who creates the world.

Damai and the fox are accidentally included in the system. They do not have any preconditions or ideas to make heroic actions. At the beginning they are socially and morally flawed, and have a miserable existence. But the fox gets into trouble, begs Damai to save her life, and gives him a rich bride. The fox, transformed into a character with extraordinary intelligence, courage, and nobility, keeps the promise given to Damai. Unwittingly, Damai succeeds the fox as the hero. He becomes Purginepaz’s son-in-law and the owner of all the riches of the snake, Karyaz. Damai is a passive participant in events, but at the same time he is the main culprit.

In the Erzyan heroic epic, women are considered to be central characters. They are strong and bright, socially mature, and active. They accomplish spiritual and military feats of moral and intellectual responsibility. They plan their actions and deeds, setting heroic tasks in front of them (FEDOSEEVA, 2007). Azravka opens the gallery of female characters. The song about Azravka continues the theme of the marital relationship between the gods and humans. Azravka cannot find a decent husband among the men, so she begins thinking about the son of IneshkayVeropez: “The first son of Ineshkay has a name Veropez. He is single and can not find a wife, or girlfriend. Azravka, a rosy apple, decided to marry him. She wanted to become a daughter-in-law of Shkay” (SHARONOV, 2010, p.57).

Azravka's father organizes a prayer in honor of the goddess of the yard of Yurtava. He slaughtered an old sheep, cooked its black head, and honored it with bows. Azravka memorized her father's prayer and appealed to Yurtava. When the prayer was over and the sheep's head was eaten, Azravka took a piece of meat, wrapped it in a white handkerchief, placed it between her breasts, and went to the barn. There she unfolded the handkerchief on the ground, bowed three times, wept, and asked Yurtava to show the way to Ineshkipaz. She wants to go there to look for her future husband because there is no husband on earth for her. Yurtava hears Azravka's prayer, turns into a lonely hare, and says:

The golden apple is a virgin. Azravka is to find her sweetheart in heaven. Do not worry so much, do not be sad. And dry your eyes. I have seen your prayer, I heard your sad prayers. I know, Azravka, where your happiness is, and will tell you who will be your husband. Your sweetheart lives in the house of Ineshkipaz. You will be Verepaz's wife. (SHARONOV, 2010, p.58).

Yurtava promised to show the way to Ineshkipaz's place. Azravka has done everything Yurtava told her to do. When she looked to the east, a dark cloud appeared. In the sky there was a flash of lightning, and the strong wind began blowing, which caught the girl and carried her towards the black cloud. Verepaz saw the beautiful girl, took her right hand, and brought her to the place of Ineshkipaz, who in turn gave Azravka to his son: "This is your bride, my child. Here's your wife, my favorite son. The Gods and people, live together, Share sorrow and happiness." (SHARONOV, 2010, p.58).

Azravka has freedom of choice. She is an independent decision-maker regarding her destiny. She is looking for the way to heaven to become the wife of the son of Ineshkipaz. It proves her high status in the family and in society, the foundations of which were based on the remnants of matriarchal ideology. The myth about Azravka raises the issue of the relationship between human beings and gods to a high ideological level. Azravka does everything to achieve her goal, behaves like a real hero, and creates her fate herself. She is intelligent, enterprising, and able to perform a heroic act, which she does.

The Mastorava by A. M. Sharonov has its own concept of authentic heroic epic and was written in accordance to the requirements of the literary form. It is based on authentic folklore material, myths, songs, and legends which tell us about the origin of the universe and about the appearance of human society in its particular ethnic images.

Thus, it becomes obvious that in the mythological plots, which were included by A.M. Sharonov on *the Mastorava*, there is a magnificent picture of the creation of the world. The gods and people solve similar problems such as creating families and social life. The gods, headed by Ineshkipaz, try to help people to realize the Creator idea which was inherent in them: to bring into their minds harmony, beauty and, perhaps most importantly, awareness of the cosmos (SHARONOV, 2001).

The scientific novelty of the present research lies in the possibility to use its results in order to study such world epics as *the Kalevala* and *the Kalevipoeg* at a new level.

Conclusions

The main characters of the heroic Mordovian epic are the supreme gods Inshkipinaz, the mother goddess Ange-Patya, the god of thunder and rain Purginepaz, the antipode Shaitan who participates in the creation of the world, the deities, the girls Azravka, Litava, and Litiva, the heroes who played an important role in the organization and functioning of the Erzyan society and law, and so on. The heroic Mordovian epic was formed as a multi-heroic epic, including many different motifs and plots which were built around the main heroes. It led to the appearance of the later literary epic form. The traditional heroic epic has a folk idea about the creation of the world, mythology, and history, as well as ideas about an ideal tsar, an ideal society, and moral views. The plot of *The Mastorava* consists of myths about the creation of the Earth and Man, about the creation of the heavenly family and people's family, songs, and stories about the election of the king, about Erzyan people, and so on. All of these are usually recreated and harmoniously transformed by the author into a literary version of the epic. The literary form of the heroic epic has authentic text in its literary and scientific systematization. *The Mastorava* by A. M. Sharonov has its own concept of authentic heroic epic and was written in accordance to the requirements of the literary form. It is based on authentic folklore material, myths, songs, and legends which tell us about the origin of the universe and about the appearance of human society in its particular ethnic images. In the epic, *Mastorava*, the mythological era seems like a perfect time to realize thoughts and deeds. By using his poetic consciousness, the author transformed mythological motifs and avoided the primeval chaos. He overcame the empiricism of the primitive existence and created the perfect fantasy world in which there is a harmonic union of the poetic, aesthetic, heroic, and rational aspects of life. The ancient heroes and plots were returned to most of the people and became the wealth of a national consciousness which received renewed life in the *Mastorava*, which conveys the history of Erzya.

Finno-Ugric epic literary forms including *the Mastorava*, are considered as national symbols. This fact makes further research of Finno-Ugric epics quite perspective not only within a literature study framework, but within folklore studies, linguistics, culture anthropology and ethnophilosophy.

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- **RESUMO:** O artigo é dedicado aos princípios de mitos, histórias e contos de contaminação sobre a criação do mundo e dos seres humanos no épico de Erzyan, Mastorava, de A. Sharonov. Este artigo enfoca as especificidades do desenvolvimento de histórias e personagens populares, a conexão entre deuses e pessoas nas autênticas obras e a projeção de motivos e heróis autênticos no texto do autor. Ao contrário do épico autêntico, o épico literário consiste em diferentes gêneros unidos pela ideia do autor. Existe o domínio dos gêneros épicos (mitos, lendas, contos), bem como alguns provérbios, rituais e músicas líricas. A simbiose de diferentes gêneros, tramas, motivos e personagens faz uma obra literária única baseada em material folclórico. Não há Kalevala, Kalevipoeg ou Mastorava em finlandês, estônio e no folclore de Erzyan. Todos eles são a criação de autores. A principal tarefa do épico literário é colocar o antigo texto épico em uma nova concha de acordo com os princípios estéticos e filosóficos do autor, com base em ideias contemporâneas sobre história, mitologia e cultura. A forma literária do épico não é uma improvisação. É o resultado dos muitos anos de trabalho de um autor. O autor cria um esquema literário e depois o enche de material. O épico heróico tradicional tem uma ideia popular sobre a criação do mundo, mitologia e história, bem como ideias sobre um *tsar* ideal, uma sociedade ideal e visão moral. Todos estes são geralmente recriados e harmoniosamente transformados pelo autor em uma versão literária do épico. Os antigos heróis e parcelas foram devolvidos à maioria das pessoas e se tornaram a riqueza de uma consciência nacional que recebeu uma vida renovada no Mastorava, que transmite a história de Erzya.
- **PALAVRAS CHAVE:** Mito. Épico. Herói épico. Lenda épica. Motivo. Enredo. Criação mundial. Criação dos seres humanos. Combinação (ou contaminação). Versão literária. Concepção do autor. Palavra poética.

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