

Along the Nadym River: A Typological and Structural Analysis of Three Northern Khanty Heroic Songs

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The first transcriptions of Ob-Ugric (Mansi and Khanty) folklore texts were made by Antal Reguly in the mid-19th century. Due to his early death, these materials remained unpublished in his lifetime. The Mansi-language part of his legacy was deciphered and published in four volumes by Bernát Munkácsi (1892–1921), while the Khanty texts were deciphered by József Pápay, who also conducted extensive fieldwork during his 1898 expedition to Siberia. Although he collected a substantial amount of new material, Pápay only published a single volume (1905). The heroic epic songs recorded by Reguly were later edited and published in several collections (Zsirai 1944–1951, Zsirai – Fokos 1963–1965), and Pápay’s own collections were also published posthumously (Fazekas 1934, Erdélyi 1972). By the late 20th century, the deterioration of Pápay’s manuscripts necessitated their urgent preservation, and his handwritten notebooks were reproduced via photoprint in eight volumes under the *Bibliotheca Pápayensis* series (1988–1995), edited by Edit Vértés.

This presentation outlines a typological and structural analysis of three heroic songs from *Bibliotheca Pápayensis*. The most salient feature shared by all three epic songs is their geographical setting along the Nadym River. Although these are three distinct texts, they were collected from only two informants (Pūrás, Nikolai Selimov), raising questions about intra-performer variability—particularly why the same narrator might recount a story bearing the same title using divergent narrative strategies and stylistic devices.

The first *Song of the Nadym River People* (*A Nadym-folyó melléki nép éneke*) is a fragment of 636 lines recorded during the winter of 1898–99 by Pápay in the village of Xiš-pūyor from an informant identified as Pūrás (The Old).

The second *Song of the Nadym River People*, although classified as a fragment, spans 2,800 lines and contains a coherent narrative arc. It was recorded by Pápay in January 1889 in Obdorsk (modern-day Salekhard) from informant Nikolai Selimov.

The third *Song of the Nadym River People*, comprising 1,110 lines, was also narrated by Pūrás and is classified as complete and suitable for publication.

The foundation for the typological analysis is provided by the studies of István Pál Demény, who, in his works (1977, 1988), distinguished five main types of Ob-Ugric heroic songs: *husband-acquiring*, *paternal vengeance*, *the hero's upbringing*, *enemy attack* (often involving *treacherous brothers-in-law*), and *wife-acquiring*.

The structural analysis is based on the identification of so-called *type scenes*—distinct thematic units that follow one another in a fixed sequence. The analytical framework of this section is informed by similar studies of Mansi heroic songs conducted by Bernát Munkácsi (1892–1921). However, given that these Ob-Ugric epic songs are comparable in form and scale to the ancient Homeric epics, they will also be examined through that lens, employing corresponding terminology (Edwards 1992).

This presentation aims to introduce a comparative analysis of these three heroic epics sharing the same title and geographical setting, to better understand their narrative typology, structural variation, and performative context, and thus represents the first step toward a comprehensive structural and folkloristic analysis of all the heroic songs preserved in József Pápay's manuscripts.

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