Perspectives on Contemporary Legend - 34th International Conference


---

**From the Museum Exhibit to the Powerful Deity: Contemporary Legends about the “Altai Princess”**

Dmitrii Doronin
Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration/ Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow

“Interfax-Russia”, Russian non-governmental news agency, reported that the trial on the case of the burial of the remains of the so-called “Altai Princess” started in January 27, 2016. One of the Altai people’s religious leaders sued the Republican National Museum in Gorno-Altaisk, where the mummy of the “Princess” is exhibited as an object of cultural heritage. Before that, archaeologists claimed that they found sensational genetic data which proved that the “Princess” was originally a young man. These and other events make up a long history of confrontation between the Altaian nationalists and archaeologists from the Russian Academy of Science. The Scytho-Siberian mummy was found in 1993 in a kurgan of the Pazyryk culture on the Ukok Plateau. The first legendary texts about “Princess Ukok” already existed at that time. Today, the corpus of these legends is really diverse and complex.

The aim of this paper is to make a typology of these legends and to analyze their content. These texts were created and broadcasted by different groups of people in Siberia (scientists, local nationalists, journalists, government officials, politicians, bloggers, representatives of mystical currents, the Altai shamans). These modern folklore texts reflect different conflicts in the Altai Republic and represent their political and religious activities. Current events enrich these legends with new motifs. Disaster (such as earthquakes, floods or downfall of helicopters) plays the most important role in this process.

These legends have different functions. For instance, they make the history of Altai more ancient and majestic by appropriating (a cultural expropriation) historic landscape and objects of ancient cultures. These legends also have a great interpretive ability. For example, they explain the war between Russia and Ukraine. Many shamans have a constant visionary experience with the spirit of the “Princess”. They communicate with her and it is an important source of new motifs for legends about the “Princess” as well.

The research was supported by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research in the framework of the Monitoring contemporary folklore: database and corpus-based analysis (Project № 16-06-00286)